Defending "Juneteenth" by John Callahan

THE NEW REPUBLIC

The FBI's Waco Disgrace

Primo Levi's Fortune

George W.'s Foreign Policy

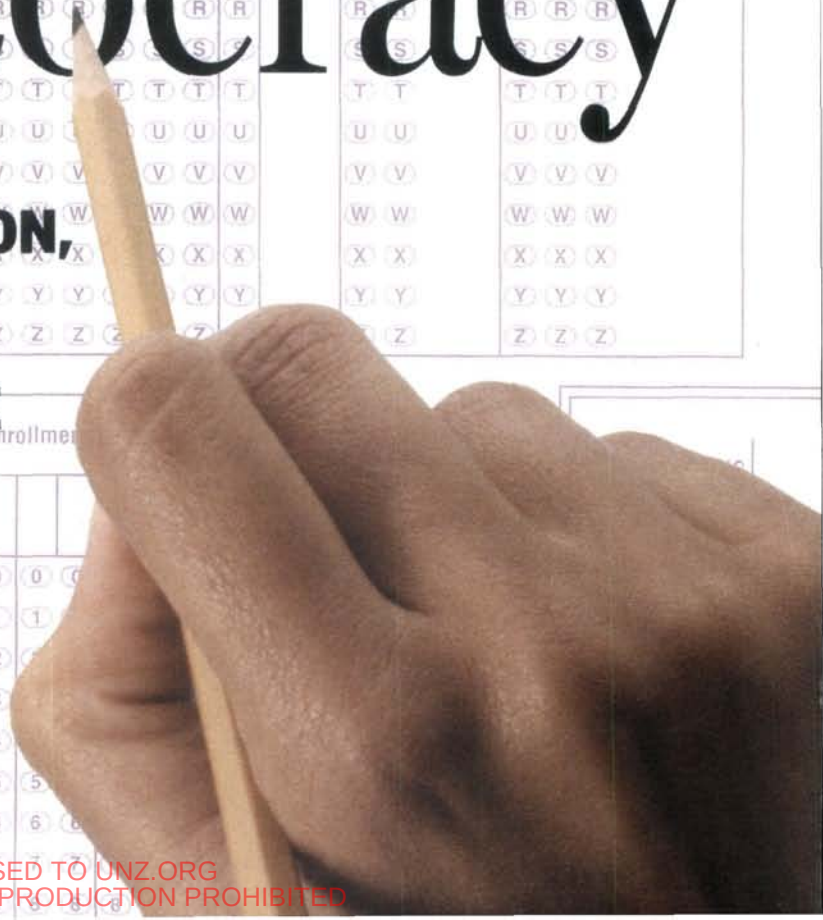
September 27, 1999

The End of Meritocracy

A DEBATE ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, THE S.A.T., AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN EXCELLENCE

ABIGAIL THERNSTROM

NATHAN GLAZER



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
SEPTEMBER 27, 1999
ISSUE 4,419

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 221, Number 13, Issue 4,419, September 27, 1999. (Printed in the U.S. on September 8, 1999.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 4 & 11, April 26 & May 3, July 19 & 26, and Sept. 13 & 20, 1999) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. For advertising inquiries, please contact Ann Rossaki at (202) 331-7494 or Shannel Myers in our NY sales office at (212) 925-5790. Yearly subscriptions, $59.94; foreign, $99.94 (U.S. funds); Canada, $79.94 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $4.00 (includes postage & handling). © 1999 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 331-0275. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Postmaster: send change of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope (Internet mail address: tnr@aol.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call 1-800-827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Corporate compassion

TO THE EDITORS:

Your cover piece on George W. Bush revealed an individual whose conservatism is anything but "compassionate" ("Taking Care of Business," by John B. Judis, August 16). It is bad enough that the so-called tort reform legislation passed in Texas—and surely to be part of a George W. campaign platform—offers nothing to the consumer, in that citizens' rights are curtailed while insurance rates are allowed to climb.

But it gets worse. Consider that, with unrealistic limits on the amount of damages that can be recovered in court, the most catastrophically injured plaintiffs—unable to work but incurring significant medical bills—end up on welfare and Medicaid. And the corporate wrongdoers who should fully absorb the risk aren't held accountable; the taxpayers are left holding the bag.

KENNETH M. TROMBLY
Washington, D.C.

Not in isolation

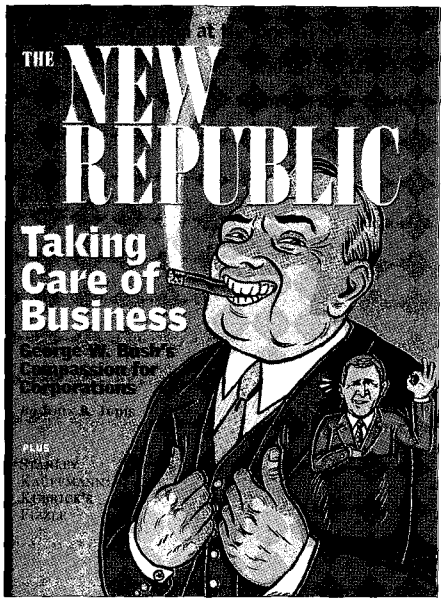
TO THE EDITORS:

Jacob Heilbrunn is way off base in criticizing conservatives for opposing the American bombing of Yugoslavia ("Isolated," August 16). He's even further off base in making this statement: "With so much anti-American vitriol now spewing from the ranks of the right, it's a wonder that *The Nation* hasn't had to close up shop."

Heilbrunn, of course, pledges allegiance to the new world order and the very unconservative idea of grafting one country's values—freedom and democracy—upon another country that has no history of such values ever flourishing. Is this being more American than "isolationists" such as Pat Buchanan, Irving Kristol, and Jack Kemp? Well, if Heilbrunn considers the failed attempt to democratize South Vietnam—through bombing and combat—a demonstration of American values, he may be right. But these are not truly conservative values, which include a willingness to die defending one's homeland.

In contrast, Heilbrunn embraces the Clintonian policy of humanitarian intervention. Of course, any true conservative—and, I would like to think, Edmund Burke himself—would oppose sending men and women in uniform to defend the foreign citizens of an "international protectorate."

JOHN DAVIS
Hyde Park, New York



TO THE EDITORS:

I don't agree with Jacob Heilbrunn's implied views on Kosovo or with his insinuation that opposing the Kosovo war ipso facto makes conservatives isolationist blame-America-firsters. Heilbrunn skillfully fuzzes the matter by randomly mixing the views of thoughtful critics with those of unreconstructed yahoos, but the illogic of his contention is illustrated by the fact that plenty of conservatives who opposed the Kosovo campaign have favored a far more vigorous approach to Iraq, North Korea, and (many of them, anyway) China. It's not America that is being judged but American interests and what does, and does not, constitute a sufficient threat to those interests to justify making war.

But never mind. One can forgive all this; disagreements happen, especially in Washington. What cannot be forgiven is Heilbrunn's attribution of the phrase "adversary culture" to Paul Hollander. Hollander is a fine fellow and now and again turns a clever phrase, but he did not invent the term "adversary culture" or ever claim to have done so. Indeed, in his 1988 book, *The Survival of the Adversary Culture*, he takes pains to show the origin and subsequent uses of the phrase, pointing out that the original coinage belongs to Lionel Trilling in a 1965 book entitled *Beyond Culture*. One would have thought that TNR's senior editors would know Trilling's work better.

ADAM GARFINKLE
Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

Rural tension

TO THE EDITORS:

Did anyone sense the tension between the two articles on agriculture ("Farmed Out," by Florence Williams, and "Money Hungry," by Charles C. Mann) in the August 16 issue?

Williams's "Farmed Out" told of the economic woes of Canadian and U.S. wheat farmers, noting how the price of wheat has fallen by more than 80 percent in real terms since 1950. The article by Mann acknowledges the errors of past predictions of worldwide famine but tries again to build the case that mass starvation and malnutrition will occur in the future, this time based on diminishing public funding of agricultural research and development.

How to balance these two perspectives on the future of agriculture? Surely some forms of public investment have high returns (especially basic education and health care in poor countries). Few people know that Norman Borlaug, scientific nurturer of the Green Revolution, may have helped save more lives than any other person in the history of the world. But we should judge each investment on its own merit.

Prices of wheat, other grains, and livestock have fallen significantly over time because of ongoing increases in productivity. The supply of these agricultural goods has increased faster than the demand, even during an era of great population growth. In addition, some basic economics provides clues to the future price of food. If the real price of food were expected to rise, prices for productive farmland would be rising. That is not the case. At least in the medium term, markets expect large supplies and low prices.

It is not necessary for all crops to achieve the same advances in productivity. Even if there is progress in only some grains, acreage can be shifted to different crops for greater advantage. Drops in transportation and trade costs mean that cheap agricultural products can be shipped to locations that have not achieved the same technological progress in agriculture.

Meanwhile, the evidence of a slowing in the worldwide population growth rate continues to increase. Further, Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has argued for years that modern famines are primarily the result of inadequate political regimes.

Mann concludes his argument by noting that the USDA spends 25 times as much on international food aid than on research and development for world food production, and gives us the parable of teaching a man how to fish instead of giving him fish. He never seems to have considered the possibility that the United States gives away so much precisely be-

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cause agricultural productivity has been growing so fast.

In the end, it is probably true both that significant productivity increases in agriculture will continue without government funding for basic research and that some types of basic research do have high social rates of return.

ERIK D. CRAFT
Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Richmond
Richmond, Virginia

Stanley vs. Stanley

TO THE EDITORS:

While scanning the barrage of negative reviews of *Eyes Wide Shut*, I consoled myself by thinking, "Don't worry, Stanley Kauffmann will get this one straight. He'll recognize that it's a brilliant movie, completely unparalleled."

So, as I eagerly opened the August 16 issue of TNR and proceeded to his column, I was disappointed: Kauffmann had gone along with the majority of American film critics and decreed Stanley Kubrick's movie to be a complete failure ("Kubrick: A Sadness"). However, the opposite is true. Let's face it: Whatever the intangible trio of Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman, and Kubrick had managed to produce would have been nitpicked to death. But Kauffmann's review epitomizes this form of mindless nitpicking. Does anyone care, and does it matter, how the title was determined? Or if the orgy scene was influenced by a film released 70 years ago? *Eyes Wide Shut* is a very modern film touching on the currently very relevant topics of marriage, infidelity, and the consequences of lust. Its possible interpretations are endless. Was it a series of revolving dreams? Is Kubrick suggesting that sexuality produces paranoia and suspicion? Or that marriage, in its modern incarnation, is a banal and futile custom? Because honored and intelligent critics such as Kauffmann have chosen to ignore such interpretations and instead bash insignificant parts of a brilliant film, it will be years before these questions are answered by someone respected and valid.

ETHAN PORTER
Teaneck, New Jersey

TO THE EDITORS:

Though usually smitten by Stanley Kauffmann's film reviews, I was baffled by his piece on *Eyes Wide Shut*. He informs us that the title of the film "is completely meaningless before and after seeing the picture." While I must give him credit for at least considering the title of the movie (many American reviewers forwent this simple task), his analysis only affirms my belief that Stanley Kubrick's 46-year-long career culminated in being received with blindness by his U.S. audience.

A keen understanding of the title and its connection to the theme lends an awareness that, alas, we are the ones with "eyes wide shut," and this certainly includes the otherwise adroit Kauffmann. In light of the title, Kubrick's valediction stands not as a meditation on sex, as Kauffmann and everyone else on earth contend, but as an exercise in separating illusion from reality.

Kauffmann admits that he has not read Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*, upon which the *Eyes* screenplay was based. If he had, I am certain that his review would have taken a different shape. Generally speaking, Schnitzler's work (and particularly *Traumnovelle*) is concerned with the interplay of illusion and reality. Kubrick spends every minute of the film showing us that the all-knowing doctor played by Tom Cruise does not know the world around him and that this chosen reality is an illusion.

Kauffmann coolly points to the film's focus on marital illusions, but if he opened his eyes, he'd find a whole lot more. Perhaps his blindness and lack of depth are testaments to Kubrick's steadfast artistic integrity.

JOSHUA WOODS
Haslett, Michigan

TO THE EDITORS:

Maybe it's a measure of the uniqueness of Stanley Kubrick's work that critics who can usually be counted on for insight write about Kubrick without offering any. In his review of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Stanley Kauffmann reports that, in a crucial sequence, Nicole Kidman's character, Alice, confesses "a temptation." This understates it a bit: What Alice confesses to her husband is that she had been prepared to give up their future together, their child, their life—which is rather different and suggests a more profound and disturbing film; namely, the one Kubrick made. Then, Kauffmann complains that the picture is all "formalism." He is nearly on to something: Kubrick does indeed suppress "plot" in his later pictures to allow a more personal, perhaps subconscious response to the screen itself (i.e., to the formal means of expression that comprise the language of cinema) as a means of receiving and understanding the emotional trajectory of the protagonist. Kauffmann hates this idea, but why? The art of cinema is defined by a fixed rectangle in the dark filled with color, light, movement and sound. The insistence that it be any less formal in the expression of its emotional and thematic content than painting, dance, or music, or that the rectangle

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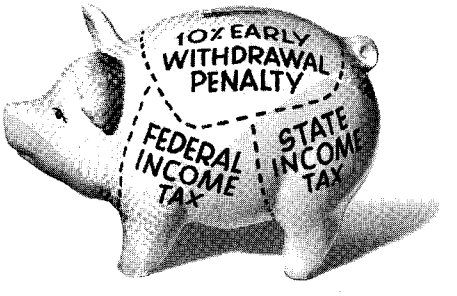

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

For Sale

I'M TRYING TO put my finger on exactly what it is that bugs me about the first family's purchase of a $1.7 million house in Chappaqua, New York. First, there's the rather unusual way the Clintons plan to finance this acquisition. Their friend, Democratic party fund-raiser extraordinaire Terry McAuliffe, has parked $1.35 million of his own very large personal fortune at Bankers' Trust to serve as collateral for the Clintons' $1.35 million mortgage. This, in itself, is an enormous gift from a private businessman to both a sitting president and potential senator—and it's magnified by the fact that it enabled the Clintons to get their loan at an interest rate of about 6.5 percent. This means that the Clintons' monthly costs of owning the house will be far lower than they otherwise would be. I know the president has done a lot to keep interest rates down for the benefit of middle-class home buyers. But just you try to get that sweet a rate from the local savings bank.

Furthermore, the president has largely himself to blame for the financial predicament that necessitated McAuliffe's angelic intervention in the first place: namely, more than $5 million in legal bills, owed to the white-shoe Washington defense attorneys who staved off Whitewater, the Paula Jones lawsuit, and the attendant Monica Lewinsky-related impeachment effort.

Still, on both points, I can see the other side. McAuliffe has already provided gigantic favors to the president and first lady, mostly in the form of organizing a multimillion-dollar defense fund that has succeeded in defraying almost half of what was originally a $10 million debt to lawyers. Exactly how is Clinton corrupted by going to the McAuliffe well one more time? It stands to reason that McAuliffe's well-advertised "friendship" with the prez has its benefits for him in his federally regulated banking and real estate businesses. Still, my impression of the man is that personal enrichment is important to him but takes second place to the sheer head rush he gets from being so close to the president—golf, midnight phone calls, the works.

As for the fact that the president and first lady have run up such a mountain of legal debt to begin with, that speaks volumes not only about their own flawed characters but also about the zeal with which their political enemies, unable to beat them at the ballot box, have pursued them through the courts. You could almost say that the legal assault on the president has amounted to a huge fine imposed on him for the crime of not being a Republican. At a minimum, the financial burdens forced on a sitting president by subjecting him to civil litigation (the dubious improvement to our democratic system bequeathed to us by the Supreme Court in *Clinton* v. *Jones*) are contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, which specifically provides that there shall be no alteration in the president's emoluments while he is in office. The Founders no doubt wrote this provision with the Terry McAuliffes of their day in mind.

No, what bothers me is the transparent, rather cheap insincerity surrounding this whole transaction. The White House line is that McAuliffe is just a "friend," and what are friends for? Come on. Even if it's not exactly corrupt, the Clinton-McAuliffe relationship is hardly a friendship in the ordinary sense. Clinton and McAuliffe were on different political teams until 1992, when McAuliffe's first choice for president, Tom Harkin, dropped out of the race and McAuliffe came aboard the Clinton campaign. And it was only after 1994, when then-Democratic congressional campaign honcho Tony Coelho brought McAuliffe into his operation, that Clinton "adopted him," as Coelho once told *Legal Times*. McAuliffe helped organize the 1996 Clinton reelection money operation, with its Lincoln bedroom overnights and plutocrats-only "coffees" at the White House. The pattern is clear: The more money McAuliffe steered the Clintons' way, the closer a friend he became.

And then there's the even bigger pretense that the house in Chappaqua is going to be the Clintons' "home" in any meaningful sense. It's been 16 years since those two lived in anything other than taxpayer-funded housing. They don't even have enough of their own furniture to fill the new place. (Wonder who will head up the Committee for Bill and Hillary's Furniture fund-raising drive?) The entire purchase is driven by nothing but the most obvious political consideration—to lend substance to the plain fiction, necessary to a 2000 Senate bid by the first lady, that Hillary Clinton is a New Yorker, indeed, a New Yorker with special ties to the New York City suburbs where the swing voters just happen to live.

You never know, but I strongly doubt that this Dutch-style colonial is even intended to be the first family's long-term nest. They've been too political, and hence too itinerant, for too long. If she loses in 2000, they can dispense with the pretense of being New Yorkers, sell, and settle with the bank and with Terry. If she wins, the new senator decamps to a condo in Washington, while Bill pursues a busy international speechmaking career. Neither of them will be spending much time in Chappaqua. Yet we are supposed to be impressed when Hillary coos about her new house: "I love it. We're so happy." She's always been a Yankees fan, too.

And she sincerely believes that it would be wrong to grant clemency to those Puerto Rican terrorists her husband has decided to let out of jail early. There's no proof of a direct Hillary role in this terrible decision, and it's true that the issue was being debated in the White House long before she decided to run for Senate. But to me it's inconceivable that the first lady, or one of her aides, was not at least given a heads-up about such a politically charged idea. If so, it's no surprise that she wouldn't have seen anything wrong with such a plan on its merits. The cause of justice for Puerto Rican terrorists was incubated in the kind of leftish Democratic circles that have always been Hillary's true ideological home. It is surprising, though, that neither she nor her advisers spotted it for the no-win political proposition that it was. In the end, Hillary decided to denounce the clemency, defending her right flank in the knowledge that the left may fume but has no choice but to come back to her in the end. Hey, her intentions are righteous and progressive, so she's entitled anyway, right?

It is that characteristically Clintonian attitude that is now abundantly on display in the Hillary for Senate campaign—right down to the cheesy half-truths about the Clintons' wonderful new family home. I've always recognized the achievements of the Clinton administration, especially in stabilizing the economy and correcting the excesses of past Democratic social policy. I thought the effort to impeach the president, despite his reckless and disgraceful behavior, was a partisan vendetta and a constitutional grotesquerie. But now that that's over, and the president's second term is stumbling toward a conclusion, it's easier to focus once again on the routine dissimulation we've had to accept as the price of whatever good the Clintons have wrought. And it's easier to understand why the polls show that growing numbers of Americans are simply getting tired of them.

CHARLES LANE

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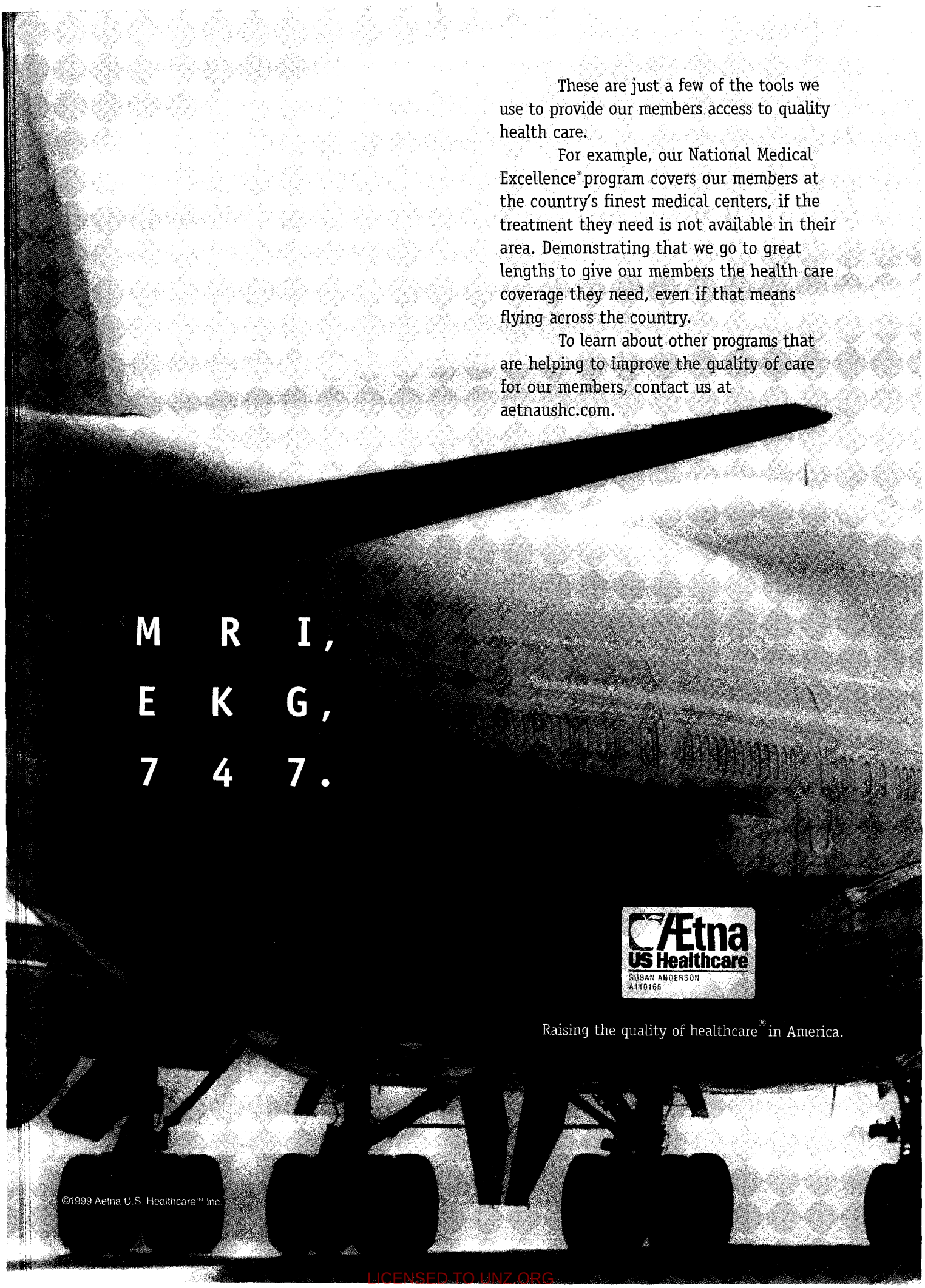

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CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

Touchy

THIS IS, PERHAPS, the wrong forum for the deeply personal revelation I am about to make. But I am worried that Matt Drudge will expose me if I don't come clean myself. Also, it is possible that the entire episode has been captured on videotape. So, here goes: For six months now, I have been engaged in an intimate relationship with George W. Bush. It is an inappropriate relationship. In fact, it is wrong.

Now, do not misunderstand. I did not have sexual relations with that man, Mr. Bush. There is no sexual relationship. And it doesn't matter what the meaning of "is" is. But it must be said that Bush has been touching me in an improper way.

We have had three encounters now. He has touched me in a hotel room. He has touched me while we were surrounded by leather and chains. And he has touched me in the most intimate of places: yes, the kitchen. And, yet, he will not speak to me. Apparently I am good enough to be touched by him, but not good enough to interview him. He makes me feel cheap: He only likes me for my body.

Each time, I wait with dread as he approaches me and reaches right for my (this is embarrassing—do you mind if I say it with my eyes closed?) hand. Sure, some would call this a handshake. But, to me, it is contact with the intent to arouse my desire for an interview—only so he can frustrate me by saying no.

When people have asked me about my relationship with Governor Bush, I have been evasive and misleading, although my answers were legally accurate. I did not volunteer information about Bush's obvious avoidance of me. I was motivated by many factors, including a desire to protect myself from embarrassment.

Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most—John McCain and Elizabeth Dole—and our God.

LET US EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE, AS Ken Starr would. In the first encounter, the Governor meets Milbank on March 22 in an Austin hotel room (OK, so it was the ballroom, after a press conference).

THE GOVERNOR: Who's this?
MILBANK: Hello, sir, Dana Milbank.
[They smile and the Governor touches Milbank on the hand.]
KAREN HUGHES, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR: From The New Republic...
THE GOVERNOR: *[Smile disappears, becomes sarcastic.]* Oh, beautiful.
HUGHES: ... and, before that, The Wall Street Journal. *[But it is too late. The Governor turns away.]*

Second encounter: The Governor meets Milbank in a firehouse in Bow, New Hampshire, in June. In the meantime, the Governor's staff has given Milbank many gifts, including a pack of trading cards. The Governor, greeting everybody in the firehouse, discovers Milbank in the kitchen, where he is trying to stay out of the way. Without Milbank's consent, the Governor grips his hand.

MILBANK: Hello, Governor.
THE GOVERNOR: Where're you from?
MILBANK: The New Republic.
THE GOVERNOR: Thanks for coming.
[This is said without sarcasm, leading Milbank to believe the relationship will soon be consummated.]

Third encounter: The two meet in August in a parking lot in Ames, Iowa, where Bush is greeting 200 bikers who are wearing leather and chains. The Governor notices Milbank and grabs his hand.

MILBANK: How are you, sir?
THE GOVERNOR: *[Looks at Milbank's baseball cap, which the Teamsters had just given him, and smirks. He says nothing and stops touching Milbank.]*

AT THIS POINT, YOU ARE HALFWAY through this column, and you have learned nothing of significance. But that is about to change. The reason I have been pursuing Bush for an interview is that I am trying to determine whether he is, in fact, a man of substance or whether he merely hires smart people.

The truth is, I continue to believe there are many reasons for liberals to like some of Bush's ideas. The few policies Bush has detailed this summer confirm that suspicion. Consider his education plan, released September 2 in Los Angeles. His plan is actually to *strengthen* the Education Department by giving it control over Head Start—a policy sure to infuriate conservatives, who have sought to abolish the department. Yes, he contemplates vouchers, but with a rigorous system of accountability. This, in essence, is the New Democrats' plan, the sort of plan Senator John Kerry was flirting with before he decided not to join the presidential race. It's closer to the New Democrats' position than Al Gore's policy, which bends to the teachers unions, is. "It's further evidence George Bush is running as a New Democrat re-branded as a compassionate conservative," says Will Marshall, who runs the Progressive Policy Institute, the New Democrats' think tank.

Earlier this summer, in Indiana, Bush spoke about his plan to help the poor. It was a nice bit of symbolism that his first major policy speech was about the poor, but it also was more than just symbolic. He offered a plan much like one some New Democrats, among them Senator Joe Lieberman, have been praising for some time: a tax credit to encourage more giving to charities that deal with the disadvantaged. Yes, the sum he would devote to the tax credit, $8 billion in his first year, is paltry. He'd have to do much better than that for the program to be useful. But it's a start. "It will be government that both knows its limits and shows its heart," he declared. "Government must be carefully limited—but strong and active and respected within those bounds." This kind of activist-government talk sounds Clintonian (in the good sense), and it enrages conservatives—a reason for everyone else to take Bush seriously.

But is Bush for real? Or is this simply what his advisers are feeding him at the moment? If he were elected, would these sensible advisers be shouldered aside by Tom DeLay and Dick Armey? These questions show why it's so important for Bush to reveal more of himself. His reluctance to talk (or his staff's reluctance to put him in harm's way) raises doubts. A wide range of reporters have begun to grumble about their lack of access to Bush—even those from some of the mass-media outlets Bush needs. Why is he hiding?

Bush's aides never technically reject my requests for an interview. They just put them off. David Beckwith, Bush's spokesman, told me this spring that he would arrange an interview. Shortly thereafter, Beckwith was (coincidentally?) fired. To hasten the day when I exchange meaningful words with the governor, I have reduced my demands: no questions about youthful indiscretions and nothing on the record (lest Bush's profanity wind up in print).

Finally, the Bush people said they could squeeze me in for a few minutes, on September 7 in New Hampshire. But, four days before the big moment, an e-mail from the Bush campaign popped up on my screen. "Scheduling informs me there is no time available on this campaign swing," it said. "Do you want me to try and squeeze you in on another swing?"

What a tease.

DANA MILBANK

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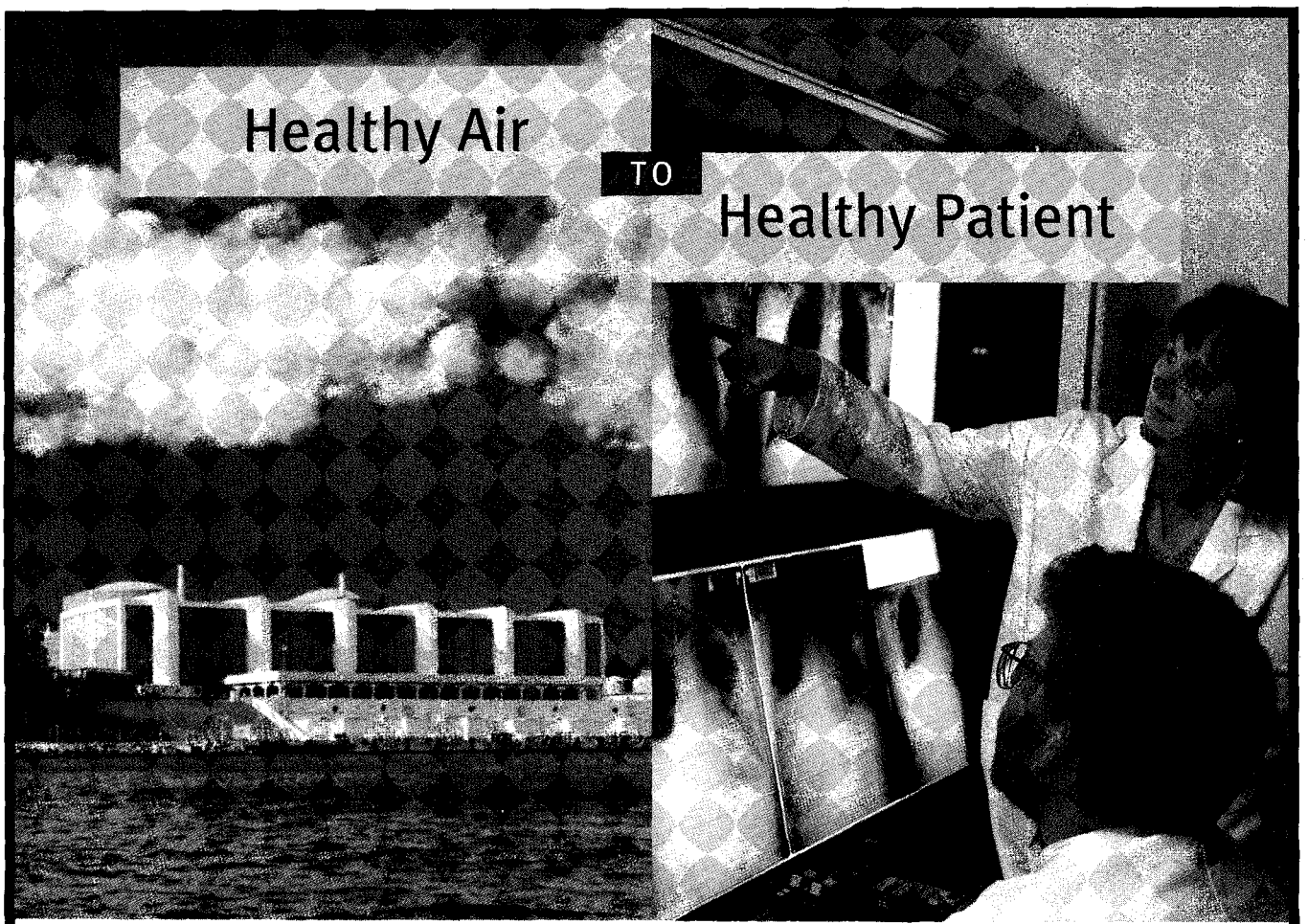

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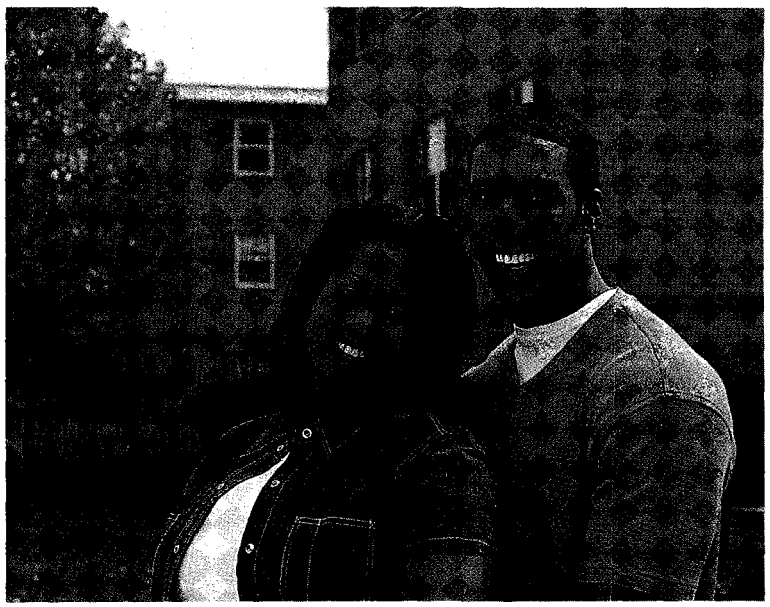

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Deserted Island

BEFORE, DURING, AND after the U.S. intervention in Kosovo, the Washington air was thick with complaints that the United States was on the verge of committing itself to an unsustainable foreign policy. As Republican Representative Mac Collins of Georgia warned in March, the Kosovo intervention "would set a dangerous precedent" that would force the United States to "commit our troops to fighting civil wars for independence in every corner of the world."

Well, maybe not. Look at what's happening in East Timor. On August 30, an overwhelming majority of the 800,000 residents of this tiny former Portuguese colony, which Indonesia has occupied since 1975, voted to reject an offer of autonomy from Indonesia and to become an independent nation. Almost immediately after the vote, anti-independence militiamen in East Timor went on a rampage, and the rampage continues. Buildings are being burned, stores are being looted, and the East Timorese are fleeing. A spokesman for U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan estimates that as many as 200,000 people have been driven from their homes. Some are hiding in hills and forests; others, who originally sought refuge in churches or with aid agencies, have been rounded up by the militias and forcibly transported across the border into Indonesian West Timor. Even worse, there are now unconfirmed—unconfirmed since journalists have been driven out and communications links have been severed—reports that East Timorese independence activists are being executed. Says one U.N. official: "It's scorched earth."

And yet, the United States has not intervened in East Timor; nor is it likely that it will. That doesn't mean, however, that the international community should stand by and permit the madness to go on. If the Kosovo intervention did establish a precedent, it was certainly that, in instances when a government launches a massive and brutal campaign of violence against its own people, the country's sovereignty is no excuse for not trying to stop it.

Alas, the U.N. Security Council appears to think otherwise. Although a number of countries are calling for an international peacekeeping force in East Timor and Australia has promised to lead it, the U.N. Security Council has refused to sanction such an operation without Jakarta's invitation. After all, to do so would be violating Indonesia's sovereignty (even though the United Nations has never recognized Indonesia's annexation of East Timor). As the Netherlands' Peter van Walsum, Security Council president for September, declared on September 7, "I can assure you that the Security Council will not give the green light if there is no permission on the part of the Indonesian government."

Unfortunately, it's extremely doubtful that permission will ever be granted, or granted in time to prevent the worst destruction. That's because, far from being an innocent bystander, the Indonesian government—or at least the Indonesian army—is complicit in the terror. The 15,000 soldiers the Indonesian government has dispatched to East Timor, ostensibly to help quell the violence, are either working in concert with the militias or standing idly by as the militiamen go about their business. Indeed, the strategy of the Indonesian government—which fears that East Timorese independence might spark other independence movements on some of the fissiparous nation's 13,000 other islands—is perfectly clear. Let East Timor serve as an example to all independence-minded Indonesian provinces: we'll let you go, but only after we sack your island.

Clearly, the only way to save East Timor is to send in an international peacekeeping force. And, while the United States doesn't have to commit troops to that peacekeeping force, it can make an effort to see to it that such a force is put into place. So far, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has adopted the Security Council's posture that the Indonesian government must agree to a peacekeeping force. If they do not agree, Albright has said, then the Indonesians "will suffer," presumably from economic sanctions. But economic sanctions can be an unwieldy tool in a fast-moving crisis such as the one in East Timor; by the time the Indonesian government felt the economic pressure, its bloody work would most likely be done.

Instead, then, the United States should focus its efforts on persuading other members of the Security Council to sanction an international peacekeeping operation despite the Indonesian government's objections. With Australia having already dispatched two warships carrying 500 troops to the waters off East Timor, the international community seems to have a capable volunteer for the mission. All Australia needs now is the proverbial green light. The precedent set by Kosovo, after all, is not that the United States itself must send troops to stop the most horrific cases of official brutality—just that somebody should. ■

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NOTEBOOK

CHIP SHOT: Vice President Al Gore's proposal to expand health insurance coverage for children—and to make coverage of children in the U.S. universal by 2005—provoked a quick response from Texas Governor George W. Bush's campaign. "The governor doesn't believe a large government solution is the answer to every problem," spokeswoman Mindy Tucker told *The Washington Post*, adding that Bush would rather "increase enrollment by people who are already eligible for government health programs." Bush is correct that millions of children currently lack insurance despite being eligible for Medicaid, which aids poor families, or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which helps families who earn a bit more but whose workplaces don't provide health insurance. But the reason so many kids miss out on S-CHIP is that many states have resisted enrolling new recipients in spite of big budget surpluses, and Bush's administration in Texas has been among the prime offenders (see "True Colors," by Jonathan Cohn, July 12). Last year, as Texas pondered what to do with its $2 billion surplus, George W. resisted attempts by the state legislature to expand S-CHIP eligibility—most likely because he wanted to save money for tax cuts. Texas is second in the nation in numbers of uninsured children. Gore's solution would be to offer states that expand S-CHIP more federal funds while penalizing those that drag their feet. No wonder Bush objects.

PRICED OUT: What are we to make of New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman's decision to bow out of the 2000 race for the U.S. Senate? On the one hand, it's stunning that an accomplished politician such as Whitman couldn't face the huge task of raising enough money to compete with one likely Democratic opponent—Jon Corzine, a former chairman of Goldman Sachs with a personal fortune of $300 million to spend on the election. "The eventual Republican nominee is now crippled," crowed New Jersey Senator Bob Torricelli, who, as chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, recruited Corzine for the race. "Raising twelve million dollars in twelve months is not going to be possible for the Republican candidates who are being discussed. This one is ours." Somehow this doesn't seem like the way a democracy should work. Certainly, it illustrates the perversity of the current federal campaign donation limits, which have been fixed at $1,000 per individual since 1974. At that rate, Whitman would have had to hit up at least 12,000 people to meet Torricelli's probably accurate estimate of her race's cost. Why not at least adjust the cap for the last quarter-century's worth of inflation, bringing it to about $3,400? On the other hand, we wonder if Whitman hasn't fallen for a colossal financial bluff. After all, back in 1996, Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein of California beat her mostly-self-financed Republican opponent, Michael Huffington, even though he outspent her by $15.6 million. And, in 1998, California Governor Gray Davis beat two self-financed opponents, Al Checchi and Jane Harman, in the Democratic primary—even though they outspent him by a combined $46.3 million. Those results suggest both that Corzine (who, like Checchi, is a political neophyte) might not even win his party's nomination against former New Jersey Governor Jim Florio and that he could still be beatable in the general election if he did. More generally, they suggest that, while money matters in campaigns, it isn't necessarily everything. Such factors as ideas and experience count, too. Or was Whitman secretly afraid she might come up short in those departments as well?

PRICED OUT II: Democratic Representative Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island (you know, Ted's son?) has put a piece of legislation before the House: H.R. 677, the Boat Building Investment Act of 1999, a bill that would give anyone who buys a domestic luxury yacht more than 50 feet in length a tax credit equal to 20 percent of the price of the boat, up to a limit of $2 million. Call it trickle-down economics à la Camelot: the plutocrats of Newport get huge tax breaks, and the little guys who hammer and nail the vessels together in Rhode Island's boat-building industry get a few more jobs. A great deal for all concerned. We have just one question. Kennedy's bill doesn't benefit just anyone rich enough to own a yacht—only those who can afford the very *biggest* yachts. Who, then, speaks for the forgotten middle class of 40-foot yacht owners? The Republicans?

CREDIBILITY PROBLEM: If there are still any doubts about the wisdom of ending the country's experiment with the independent counsel law, they should be put to rest by the conclusion of the case against Henry G. Cisneros, the former secretary of housing and urban development. After a four-year, $10 million probe, Cisneros pled guilty to a misdemeanor count of lying during an FBI background check about the amount of money he had once paid to his ex-mistress. Neither the affair nor the payments themselves were ever considered crimes, and Cisneros had previously acknowledged both to the Clinton transition team and to the FBI. What he did was downplay the embarrassing details. At least one Republican senator said the discrepancy would not have affected their votes to confirm him. Yet, rather than rebuke Cisneros and embarrass him for his mistake, the independent counsel, David Barrett, tried to imprison him for up to 90 years. In the process, he incarcerated Cisneros's former mistress on tangential charges, hoping to get her to give evidence against Cisneros, and indicted Cisneros's subordinates. He also helped drive Cisneros, a basically public-spirited and intelligent official, to retreat to the private sector. After the plea agreement—which involved no jail time and a paltry $10,000 fine—the prosecution tried to insist that its case had been worth pursuing. "This disposition should in no way be viewed as minimizing the serious ethical breach by Mr. Cisneros," Barrett said. Perhaps. Yet it should also not be viewed as minimizing Barrett's own appalling lack of prosecutorial discretion.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: An article by Ken Bode in our last issue misidentified Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle. He is not the Senate majority leader—not yet, at least. ■

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The "one China" problem.

Straits Jacket

By Robert A. Manning *and* James Przystup

The crisis simmering between China and Taiwan should make President Clinton's upcoming meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in New Zealand more tense than usual. But why is there a crisis in the Taiwan Strait at all? Henry Kissinger blames Taiwan. In a recent op-ed in *The Washington Post*, Kissinger said Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's July 9 announcement that, in the future, Taipei would deal with the mainland on the basis of "special state-to-state relations" had breached the "one China" policy that Beijing, Taipei, and Washington have adhered to and prospered under since 1972. Henceforth, Kissinger suggested, the United States should "insist on Taiwanese restraint in challenging a framework that, in fact, ensures their autonomy" (and that Richard Nixon and Kissinger developed). Others have pointed to China's outraged response to Lee's "state-to-state" announcement, arguing that the problem is not Taiwan's provocations but China's aggressiveness.

But neither explanation can quite account for why the "one China" formula, which managed to keep relations between Taiwan and China stable for so long, should suddenly be called into question now. The real reason for the breakdown is that Taiwan has become a democracy. And, because of its inability to recognize the full implications of this, the Clinton administration is now pursuing a misguided policy that could be making war more rather than less likely.

Back when Taiwan was still an authoritarian state ruled by Chiang Kai-shek, the "one China" policy had a very different meaning. For years after Mao's 1949 victory on the mainland forced him to flee to Taiwan, Chiang clung to the belief that he would one day retake the mainland and reunify China on his terms. Thus, he was just as determined as Mao was to resist any formal declaration that his island and China were two separate states. Indeed, talk of Taiwanese independence was a crime under Chiang's regime. U.S. governments, seared by the "who lost China" debate and unwilling to give up all hope that the Chinese Communists might one day be toppled, supported Chiang, refusing to recognize mainland China and anointing Taiwan as the sole legitimate government of China.

That all changed in the early '70s, when Nixon and Kissinger initiated their strategic opening to mainland China. To do so, they had to placate both Mao, who still claimed Taiwan, and American conservatives, who were wary of selling out free China. The solution was the artful political fiction known as the "one China" policy, which evolved into what China hands refer to as "the three communiqués" and the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).

The first communiqué enabled Nixon and Kissinger to open ties to China in 1972. It was a joint statement that said: "The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China.... The United States Government does not challenge that position." Not agrees with, not endorses, but simply acknowledges. The Carter administration reaffirmed that position in the 1978 communiqué fully normalizing diplomatic relations. To ensure that breaking formal ties with Taipei did not mean abandoning the city to Beijing's tender mercies, Congress passed the TRA in 1979, legislating the framework for continued, but unofficial, political, military, and cultural ties.

ROBERT NEUBECKER

Contrary to widespread perception, the TRA doesn't require the United States to defend Taiwan. It only says that the United States will help provide the means for Taiwan to defend itself and will view with "grave concern" any use of force. Nonetheless, to assuage Beijing's concerns, in 1982 the Reagan administration issued a third communiqué pledging to limit the quantity and quality of arms sales to Taiwan, based on the expectation that there would be a peaceful resolution of the issue. At the same time, to assuage Taiwan's concerns, Reagan gave Taiwan a set of quiet, informal promises known as the "Six Assurances," in which the United States agreed not to alter the TRA, not to terminate arms sales, not to consult with China before making decisions on U.S. arms sales, not to mediate between China and Taiwan, not to pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China, and not to formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan.

In this way, the United States managed to strike a careful balance. The "one China" principle remained sacrosanct, but the rightful leadership of that one China was left ambigu-

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ous—as was the time frame within which Taiwan and China would reunify. No less important, the United States established a strategic ambiguity, deterring China by making Beijing feel sufficiently certain that the United States would defend Taiwan if Beijing launched an attack, while leaving Taiwan uncertain about the U.S. commitment to defend the country if Taipei provoked Beijing by a formal, unilateral declaration of independence.

As political pluralism developed in Taiwan, however, the conditions that made this formula so successful began to erode. Ironically, Taiwanese democracy is partly the result of U.S. pressure. For decades, U.S. administrations had urged Chiang's sometimes heavy-handed authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) party to liberalize. In 1988, 13 years after Chiang's death, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, initiated a transition to democracy. His successor, Lee Teng-hui, was elected first by the parliament, then in 1996 by the voters themselves, making him the first directly elected Chinese leader in 5,000 years. As the island democratized, the ruling KMT mainlanders, who had come over in 1949, began to yield to local Taiwanese. (Lee himself is the first native Taiwanese president from the KMT.) At the same time, the Taiwanese began to feel a sense of separate, local identity.

This tendency was heightened in 1989 by Beijing's bloody crackdown on political dissent at Tiananmen Square. Meanwhile, Taiwan's political dynamism, on top of its remarkable capitalist economic success, fueled its citizens' desire for greater international standing and recognition. Taiwan, in short, wants its own international political space. Understandably, the Taiwanese public is no longer content to be a ghost in the international system, as the current "one China" policy requires. But, with both Washington and Beijing still treating the 1970s framework as an idée fixe, growing international tension became inevitable.

It began in earnest in 1995. The spark was Lee's request for a visa to travel to the United States in order to speak at a reunion at his alma mater, Cornell University. Beijing protested that granting Lee a visa would be a violation of the "one China" policy. And, initially, the State Department, Pentagon, and National Security Council agreed. Congress, however, did not and voted overwhelmingly in favor of granting Lee a visa. The administration then reversed its course. Furious, China launched amphibious landing exercises across the strait from Taiwan. There was little U.S. reaction, which possibly emboldened China to escalate matters further in March 1996 by conducting large-scale military maneuvers and missile tests within 30 miles of two of Taiwan's major ports. This precipitated an international crisis, with the United States sending two aircraft carrier battle groups into adjacent waters.

While the incident ended peacefully, it led the Clinton administration to rethink its position on China. Officials resolved to seek a rapprochement. During summit meetings in Washington in October 1997 and in Beijing in June and July of 1998, Clinton and Jiang said they were committed to "build toward a constructive strategic partnership." But it soon became clear that the Clintonites were willing to go too far to reassure China. On the way home from Beijing, Clinton stopped in Shanghai, where, in response to a question, he said that the United States "doesn't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan—one China." (The president added that "we don't believe that Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement.") These are known as the "three no's", and no American president had ever stated them publicly, let alone on Chinese soil. Indeed, both sides reacted strongly: Beijing was jubilant, Taipei distraught.

Afterwards, in classic Clintonian fashion, the administration dissembled, claiming that the president had broken no new ground with respect to Taiwan. Yet Clinton's words had, in fact, subtly changed policy. With the articulation of his version of the three no's, Clinton was signaling a clear tilt toward Beijing on Taiwan—implicitly accepting Beijing's position that Taiwan is a province of China. For the citizens of Taiwan's democracy, this remains an open question, to put it mildly, and not one for the United States to decide for them.

This chain of events understandably alarmed Taiwan's leadership. If the United States sought a "strategic partnership" with China, where did that leave Taiwan? The three no's seemed to hint at an alarming answer. But it didn't stop there. U.S. officials began speaking publicly of the need for vague "interim agreements" between China and Taiwan. This diplomatic shift appeared to breach the Reagan era assurances, which administration officials say remain U.S. policy.

Shortly after the three no's episode, Lee formed a commission to begin quietly reviewing Taiwan's options. Taipei felt increasing pressure from the Clinton administration to enter into political discussions with Beijing on sensitive issues leading to reunification. From Taipei's perspective, the recent shifts in U.S. policy were premature and constricted Taiwan's room for diplomatic maneuver vis-à-vis Beijing. In the early '90s, Taipei had formulated negotiating positions that declared Taiwan's status as a separate political entity. Taiwan anticipated that some new initiative on its status was likely on China's October 1 celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Mao's revolution. Wang Daohan, Beijing's chief negotiator and a confidant of Jiang's, was due in Taipei that month.

By declaring his new formulation, which was explained as only a nuanced shift from his previous position, Lee would cleverly remove Taiwan from the box he believed it was being put in. And, not surprisingly in a democracy, he would also define the issue for the upcoming March 2000 presidential elections in Taiwan, seeking to improve the prospects of his designated successor.

So, where does this leave the United States? If there is a lesson, it is that no matter how hard the Clintonites try to force events into it, the old policy framework under which all three sides of the triangle have prospered for a generation is no longer adequate. It requires adjustment to account for the views of Taiwan's 22 million citizens, most of whom support Lee. Otherwise, the Clinton administration—which claims that the enlargement of democracy is a pillar of its national security strategy—will be in the odd position of attempting to contain the results of democracy out of excessive deference to the decidedly undemocratic government in Beijing. ■

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

No Place to Learn

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

Have you heard about the teacher who wondered what caused the creaking sound in the classroom ceiling? Eventually she found out. The ceiling, waterlogged from a leaking roof, fell down on her desk.

The teacher's experience—and that of her students, who arrived a few minutes later—is a good emblem of the infrastructure crisis that states and school districts are facing. School buildings are aging and beginning to fall apart, and many are seriously overcrowded.

We can't dismiss the problem by saying it's *just* a question of the "physical plant." Kids deserve schools that tell them, "You and what you are doing here are important." And we know from research that student achievement suffers in crowded and deteriorating schools. If we're serious about kids' meeting new and higher academic standards, we have to make sure they have decent places to learn.

At the same time, the infrastructure crisis places an enormous burden on states and school districts—and many will need help.

The average age of a school building in this country is 42, and many are much older. They take a real beating every year, so it should be no surprise that nearly one third of our schools need basic and costly repairs just to keep them safe and functioning. Some—approximately 28,000—need new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems so kids don't freeze in the winter and swelter in the summer, and so they have decent air to breathe. Some—approximately 23,000—have inadequate plumbing. And 21,000 need major roof repairs.

Making these improvements will not be cheap. The General Accounting Office figures it will cost $112 billion to bring existing schools up to a decent standard. This is in addition to the money that states and school districts have already spent. And it will not end the infrastructure crisis.

One Million More

Over the next ten years, one million more students will crowd into classrooms that have already reached their capacity—and then some. We have to build enough new classrooms to accommodate these kids and ensure smaller class size. And if we hope to educate them in computer and Internet technology, we have to wire the new classrooms as well as the many existing classrooms that still have chalk and chalkboards as their only technology. All this comes to an additional $73 billion.

Kids deserve schools that tell them, "What you're doing here is important."

Since states and local school districts are largely responsible for education, the lion's share of this money has to come from them. Most have begun work, and many are doing an extraordinarily good job. Chicago, for example, is in the midst of an ambitious school improvement program, and fixing the physical environment is a big part of it. Not only did they end social promotion; they repaired and built classrooms. At this point, 13 new schools, 23 additions, 27 annexes, and over two thousand other projects are completed or underway, and the city has spent $1.75 billion dollars. But Chicago will need $2.15 billion more to finish the job. And even though the U.S. is in a period of prosperity, many states and districts will be hard-pressed to find the money they need.

A Modest Proposal

The federal government can't fund the work, but it can and should help. The President proposes that tax credits be used to help pay the interest on bonds that districts float to finance school construction. This would help relieve the financial burden on states and school districts without involving the feds in decisions that should be made at the local level. The proposal will not erase the $200 billion national shortfall, but if the nation invests $3 billion in tax credits over a period of five years, it will generate $25 billion in interest-free, local school bonds. That would be enough to build 6,000 local schools—interest free.

Bills adopting this approach have been introduced by Reps. Charles Rangel (D. N.Y.) and Nancy Johnson (R. Conn.) and Senator Charles Robb (D.Va.), and there is a good chance that school infrastructure legislation will be considered this fall.

The idea of using federal tax credits to finance school building projects has support from a near majority in the House. But for Congress to take action, senators and representatives will have to hear from their constituents.

No child in America should be in an overcrowded school or in a classroom without proper lighting, ventilation, and equipment. Not today, and certainly not in the new millennium. ▮

***Where We Stand* is published once every month in *The New Republic*. To comment, write to Sandra Feldman, AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001.** **© Sandra Feldman 1999.** **Visit our web site (http://www.aft.org).**

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The real disgrace at Waco.

Under Fire

By GREGG EASTERBROOK

IT'S UNSETTLING, TO say the least, to learn via recently unearthed government tape recordings that the FBI has spent six years falsely denying that it used pyrotechnic military-style tear gas canisters on the final day of the Waco siege. But there was other military hardware at Waco, too. And while that hardware—specifically, combat helicopters deployed on the first day of the siege—has not drawn public attention, it may be much more significant than the military tear gas when it comes to explaining what really went wrong and why Waco belongs among the shameful events in the annals of modern government. In understanding Waco, it's time to follow the helicopters.

On its first day at Waco, a raiding party of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents approached the Branch Davidian compound. The ATF had a valid reason to investigate the Davidians: The cult was thought to be acquiring automatic weapons, which is illegal and exactly the sort of suspicious act that law enforcement agencies ought to scrutinize. Whether the ATF needed to open with a belligerent thrust is, however, another matter. On several occasions, local police had simply knocked on the Davidians' door and entered without confrontation. The ATF held a warrant for David Koresh's arrest and might have snatched him on one of his trips outside the compound. Instead, dozens of ATF agents in flak vests, brandishing assault rifles, charged the compound door, while others took positions on the roof. Some agents wielded concussion grenades ("flash-bangs"), which can harm and also make the sort of end-of-the-world noise sure to cause a cult member to lunge for a weapon. The plan called for these agents to throw the flash-bangs early in the raid *even if the Davidians did not resist*. Thus, it seemed a recipe for confrontation, creating the appearance of the very sort of government apocalypse the ATF knew the Davidians feared.

Nevertheless, as ATF agents first advanced on the compound, no shooting occurred on either side. Then, three military helicopters flown by the Texas National Guard arrived at the scene. One was a UH-60 Blackhawk, a large helicopter that is among the military's most advanced. And, yes, its standard paint job is a dark shade close to black.

Just how ATF personnel ended up riding in military helicopters is puzzling in itself. According to the admirable but overlooked 1995 book *The Ashes of Waco*—written by a mainstream author, the Texas journalist and former Neiman Fellow Dick Reavis—prior to the raid, the ATF fabricated evidence that the Davidians were manufacturing drugs. These accusations enabled it to invoke a regulation allowing military participation in anti-drug raids. But why contrive evidence just to gain access to military helicopters rather than simply use standard police models? Official ego seems the likely reason. Military helicopters are much zoomier than their civilian counterparts and, according to Reavis's book, ATF supervisors wanted a huge, magnificent Blackhawk as their airborne "command platform"—though a standard police helicopter could have served just as well.

Imagine what the Davidians, known to share the far right's peculiar dread of government helicopters, must have thought when they saw a Blackhawk approaching. The silhouettes of military helicopters are distinctive and easily recognizable, particularly to weapons buffs such as the Davidians. The cult members would have known that military helicopters such as the Blackhawk can mount machine guns, rockets, and similar weapons never found on police helicopters—the stuff of war, not of Fourth Amendment searches. The Blackhawk used in the Waco raid was not armed, but while it is possible to tell that a helicopter is military from its silhouette, a glance will not necessarily tell a ground observer whether that helicopter is armed. (Whether ATF agents aboard helicopters fired into the compound with small arms is a subject of continuing debate.) To the Davidians—indeed, to anyone—the appearance of a frontline combat helicopter would suggest an attack, not an orderly search.

THE ARRIVAL OF the military helicopters seems to be what transformed Waco from a case of overzealousness into a tragedy. Until that point in the operation, neither the ATF agents nor the Davidians had pulled the trigger. It was only when military helicopters appeared in the sky behind the compound building, some evidence suggests, that the firing began. The first shots probably came from Davidians trying to drive the helicopters off, and of course they should not have done this. But when the ATF brought combat helicopters to the scene, it created an environment of combat. Once the first recoil sounded, the "shots fired" mentality took over and a hellish gun battle commenced in which four ATF agents and several Davidians died. (The other theory is that the firing started when ATF agents began shooting the Davidians' dogs.)

Owing to the legal barrier against military participation in most domestic police actions, the presence of the U.S. Army's Delta hostage rescue team during some parts of the Waco siege has recently received attention. But the FBI insists that the Delta units never actually did anything. The military helicopters, on the other hand, were in the sky and may have led to grave harm.

Details such as these increasingly suggest that Middle America has cause to remain fixated on Waco. First, the ATF staged a paramilitary raid when it might have conducted a standard search, as regular police had done. The best explanation for the initial ATF plan is incompetence; the range of possibilities goes downhill from there. Regarding the competence point: If a commando assault really was necessary, the raiders should not have appeared in midmorning, but just before dawn, when the targets would be asleep; most successful commando actions occur during the predawn hours. Assuming that bad judgment and ineptitude

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explain the ATF approach, it was hardly the Davidians alone who suffered. Four valiant agents were sent to their deaths by cowardly superiors snuggled safely in getaway aircraft. When the shooting began, two of the three helicopters immediately bolted for cover—the higher-ups running from their own plan, leaving their subordinates behind to die.

Then the FBI took over and, 51 days later, staged a second assault. Attorney General Janet Reno justified this action—as opposed to just waiting things out, since the Davidians weren't exactly going to escape—on the grounds that there were reports that child abuse was occurring in the compound. Later, the Justice Department itself concluded there had never been any such reports. So either Reno lied or the FBI lied to her: those are the alternatives. Reno also said the FBI had to act because agents on the scene were getting tired. So the government had Blackhawk helicopters on call but no idea where to obtain sleeping bags.

Given the incoherence of Reno's explanations for the second assault, it is hard to fault the oft-heard supposition that the event was an attempt by federal units—which were by then equipped with overwhelming force, including armored assault vehicles on loan from the U.S. Army—to deal the Davidians some revenge for the four agents' deaths. The General Accounting Office reported last week that, before the second assault, the FBI obtained from the Army 250 high-explosive 40 mm rounds of the type fired from infantry grenade launchers. That many explosive shells would have been sufficient to blow the cult's compound to smithereens; firing even one could easily have killed bystanders, including the Davidian children inside the compound. It is hard to imagine what valid law enforcement purpose the FBI, supposedly managing a hostage situation (the children), could have had in mind for 250 high-explosive projectiles designed to cause general destruction.

The FBI says there was no vengeance motive, but, with regard to Waco, its credibility is not exactly impeccable right now. For instance, as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, Richard Rogers, the FBI official who ordered the use of pyrotechnic tear gas at Waco, was sitting behind then-FBI Director William Sessions as he testified to Congress that no such gas

No Exit

EVER SINCE THE 1993 catastrophe at Waco, anti-government conspiracy theorists, as well as more sober critics of federal law enforcement, have been obsessed with one question: Who started the fire? But this isn't really the right question. The fire was almost certainly set by the Davidians themselves. The more important question is this: Why did 80 people—76 Davidians and four ATF agents—die in a porous building with plenty of ways out, in a fire that offered ample time for escape? The answer, unfortunately, implicates the FBI and its use of tear gas during the raid that preceded the fire.

That, at least, is the conclusion of a 1995 study by Failure Analysis Associates Inc., a reputable accident investigation firm whose client list includes the Department of Defense, the Ford Motor Company, and General Electric. As a joint House subcommittee was preparing for hearings on Waco in 1995, the National Rifle Association hired Failure Analysis to construct a computer simulation and detailed study of the Davidians' final hours. But Democrats sought to block the study from being admitted to the hearings because of its NRA connection. Republicans had other witnesses and decided it wasn't worth the fight. And conspiracy theorists ignored it since Failure Analysis refuted the notion that the FBI sparked the blaze. With no champions, the Failure Analysis study was deep-sixed.

But it deserves a second look. Just before noon on April 19, 1993, federal agents mounted the last of four assaults on the Branch Davidian compound, this one aimed at a bunker sheltering 34 Davidians, most of them women and children. A modified M-60 tank emptied two 30-gram canisters of military-strength CS tear gas into the room. Failure Analysis determined that CS concentrations within the next minutes reached 90 milligrams per cubic meter, nine times the level the military recommends for subduing enemy troops.

Minutes after the tear gas was emitted, three fires started in three separate parts of the compound over the course of 123 seconds. The nearly synchronous ignition in widely separate locations supports the FBI's contention that the fires were planned and set by suicidal and murderous Davidian leaders. Still, why did only nine of 85 Davidians make it out of the building?

The fire did move quickly, driven by heavy winds whipping through holes punched into the structure by FBI tanks. But the same holes that helped stoke the fire should have offered easy exits, Failure Analysis noted. FBI agents say the Davidians stayed because they chose to die, and the ones who tried to escape were shot. But Greg Haussmann, a lead author of the Failure Analysis study, notes that only 18 of the 76 bodies recovered had gunshot wounds; it's doubtful that the rest simply let themselves fry. "Fire is a very visceral thing," Haussmann says. "I don't care how dedicated or crazy you are; you cannot let yourself burn alive."

Haussmann contends that something prevented people from escaping. He argues that the impediment was the FBI's tear gas—especially for the 34 victims who died inside the bunker. It's likely some of those in the bunker had already been rendered unconscious by the CS gas when the fire roared through the complex. Others may have simply been too weakened or dazed from the gas to flee.

It's true that the FBI couldn't have known that a fire would break out just minutes after its fourth assault. Six hours of tear gas strikes had failed to force the Davidians to surrender, and agents must have concluded that they'd have to incapacitate their opponents with massive doses of CS gas and then move in for the arrest. But if Failure Analysis is correct, that was a disastrous miscalculation. The firm's conclusion is one that neither the conspiracy theorists nor the government wants to hear. Branch Davidian leaders did indeed kill themselves and their followers. But the murder-suicide worked with the unwitting help of the FBI.

JONATHAN WEISMAN

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had been used. But use of the military gas canisters, which may only have been a tactical misjudgment, is minor compared to the overall plan of the second assault, which was to flood the compound with tear gas. Tear gas doesn't just produce tears; it causes choking and convulsions. It is far more dangerous to children, whose lungs are sensitive, than to adults; to children, it causes agony. And there was the FBI's armored vehicle, pumping tear gas for six hours into a compound full of children.

The revival of Waco as a national concern reflects poorly on the ATF, the FBI, and Reno, who by this point seems to have spent her entire tenure in the Clinton administration apologizing for one embarrassment or another. Reno gets a sort of backhanded credit for her honesty; she is always the first to admit a foul-up. But the fact that she's constantly admitting them seems, at this point, revealing.

The revival of concern about Waco also reflects poorly on the media establishment. Though the flames at Waco were prominent in every medium, the outrage quotient was low—running through the coverage was the sentiment, "They were a religious cult; they got what they asked for." It is true that the Davidians were extremely strange, and, by the end, some became killers. But being strange doesn't mean you deserve to die, and, as a group, the Davidians had done others no harm until the government arrived and started bungling. The fact that the Davidians were strange in a religious way added to the media's inclination to dismiss this tragedy. As Reavis wrote, "The job of finding out what happened ... ultimately fell to people outside the media's salaried circles, to scholars, defense attorneys, survivors, and self-financed independent scholars." In the end, only the nut cohort cared about the dead of Waco, and now the nuts are revealed to have been right about something important.

AS THE TRUTH is finally being told, the FBI is slipping in public esteem once again. From J. Edgar Hoover's time until today, it has been an agency built on a culture of hard work and courage in the field coupled with self-interest and deceit at the top. Part of President Clinton's legacy must be that the fiasco at Waco, followed by the FBI's lies and the Justice Department's studied lack of interest in getting to the truth of the matter, gave Americans a reason to distrust the competence and honesty of government, which is bad in general and particularly terrible for political liberalism.

Disturbing as the performance of federal units at Waco was, some allowance must be made for the judgment of those on the scene, who were putting their own safety at risk. The same cannot be said for the senior FBI officials who have now spent six years lying about a key fact in the case—lying to the public, lying to Congress, lying to the courts. The officials were in danger only of their sinecures, not their lives. In the fundamentals of law enforcement, human error happens, but it is *never* OK to lie. If FBI Director Louis Freeh had any sense of honor, he'd resign. But honor doesn't seem to mean much at the FBI these days. There is a simple word for the condition the FBI has brought on itself: disgrace. ■

The latest Israel-PLO deal.

Lucky Sharm?

By ROBERT SATLOFF

THREE YEARS AGO, after a series of horrific bombings in Israel, President Clinton invited an array of world leaders to an anti-terrorism summit in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. Clinton's goal was to save the Israeli-PLO peace process and, with it, Shimon Peres's Labor-led government. The process survived, Peres didn't, and the summit had little lasting impact on terrorism. Last week, Sharm was the setting for a more modest ceremony. Under the motherly gaze of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat signed a major agreement. Whether this Sharm event will have more lasting value than the previous one will become evident in five months, when Israel and the PLO are scheduled to produce a "framework agreement on permanent status"—already known to aficionados as FAPS. This will be a sort of plan to make a plan to settle final status issues.

In many respects, the Sharm accord looks like old wine in, well, old bottles. Ten of its eleven articles either repeat language from past agreements or tinker with their still-unimplemented obligations. For the Palestinians, Sharm attaches specific dates to past Israeli promises to open a key market street in Hebron, inaugurate a land passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and permit the construction of a Gaza seaport. As for the Israelis, Sharm gives them two extra months to complete withdrawals envisioned in last year's Wye accord and permits Israel to conduct them so that the Palestinians get more contiguous territory while Israel retains the strategic Judean desert. Also, Sharm highlights the bilateralism of Israeli-Palestinian peace, suggesting (if not promising) less direct U.S. involvement, as Barak wants.

None of these changes alters the total amount of West Bank land—40 percent—to be under full or partial Palestinian control by the end of this stage. Still, many of Sharm's clauses are subtle concessions by Israel. For the first time, Sharm affirms in writing a hotly contested oral promise Israel made to release Palestinian "security prisoners." At Wye, Israel had managed to retain linkage between its territorial withdrawals and specific Palestinian obligations, such as confiscating illegal weapons or amending the PLO charter. Israel's Sharm negotiators agreed to specific dates for further withdrawals without direct linkage to outstanding Palestinian obligations.

In perhaps the most important shift, the Sharm accord commits Israel to a specific date by which "permanent status negotiations" must end: September 13, 2000. Heretofore, the negotiating calendar was left ambiguous, so as not to provide the Palestinians with a ready-made trigger for a unilat-

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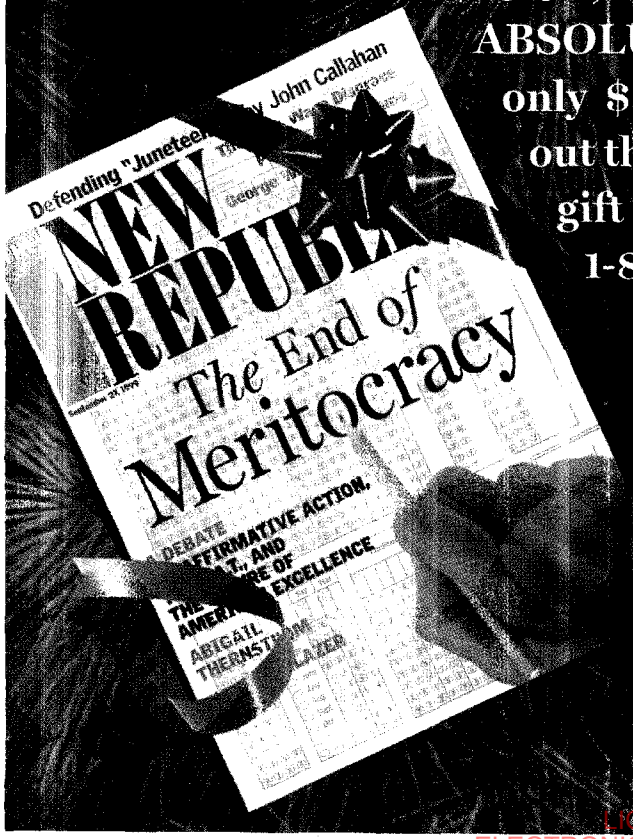

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eral declaration of independence. Clinton and the European Union had previously floated vague target dates, but Israel's own acceptance of a firm date may give the PLO a deadline on which its patience with talks can "legitimately" expire.

What's in it for Israel? Arafat's assent to the following 29 words: "The two Sides will make a determined effort to conclude a Framework Agreement on all Permanent Status issues in five months from the resumption of the Permanent Status negotiations." Thus the parties agreed that they would no longer pursue a detailed final settlement as the goal of long-suspended permanent status negotiations; instead, the more modest aim would be the achievement of a broad understanding about their future relationship.

But, given the fact that new interim agreements have become a nearly annual ritual in the peace process, why would Barak want to demand yet another one? Sharm is Barak's antidote to the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of Middle East diplomacy, in which the party that has every interest in changing the status quo (the PLO) evinces no desire to engage in good-faith negotiations to accomplish that, while the party that should be generally satisfied with the way things are (Israel) is eager to see them changed. Over the past three years, Israelis of varying stripes have tried to get Arafat to engage in permanent status negotiations on the issues he ostensibly cares about most—Jerusalem, statehood, Israeli settlements, Palestinian refugees—but the PLO leader has always dodged.

Good-faith negotiations are about compromise, but the PLO believes that it already made its historic compromise by grudgingly—and perhaps not irrevocably—accepting Israel's right to exist within its pre-1967 borders, and that it therefore needs to give no more. As a result, not a single PLO leader has yet to brave ridicule (or worse) by suggesting a compromise on the goal of winning every inch of the West Bank, Gaza, and eastern Jerusalem. Arafat prefers to threaten a unilateral declaration of independence which, even if it were unchallenged, would leave him with less land than he would get in a bilateral agreement. Unlike a negotiated peace, though, for Arafat such a declaration would preserve the right to press his maximal claims.

The FAPS is designed to be the mechanism to force Arafat to reveal his true intentions. Rather than wait until September 2000 or some later date—as the late Yitzhak Rabin intoned, dates are never "sacred" in this diplomacy—the search for an agreement by February 2000 will show whether there is any give at all in the Palestinian approach to a final peace with Israel. In essence, Barak believes he has found a way to reduce the dithering time from twelve months to five.

Additionally, Barak's FAPS timetable meshes with his plan for Syria and Lebanon. If the still-dormant Israeli-Syrian talks finally resume in mid-autumn—President Clinton plans to travel to Turkey in November and just might undertake a surprise Middle East peace shuttle—they may attain critical mass shortly after January 1. That timing might permit Barak to play Arafat off against the Palestinian leader's old nemesis, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad: the prospect of an Israeli-Palestinian FAPS could spur Assad to speed up talks with Israel, lest he be excluded from Arab-Israeli peacemaking once again; or fear of a agreement on the Golan Heights might motivate Arafat to cut his own deal with Israel sooner rather than later. Either way, Israel would benefit.

If Barak's plan succeeds in smoking out Arafat or pitting the Syrians and Palestinians against each other in competition for Israel's attention, it will be deemed brilliant. However, the PLO leader has a long record of turning weakness to advantage, and the text of the Sharm accord itself does not give Israel much room to force Arafat's hand. The last Wye withdrawals are scheduled for January 20, three weeks before the FAPS target date. An American side-letter to the Palestinians promises Arafat that Israel could not hold that withdrawal hostage to progress on FAPS negotiations. And, even in the wording of the Sharm agreement, the Palestinians promised only to make a "determined effort" to reach this framework accord—an imprecise term at best. Chances are that this phase of negotiations will, like its predecessors, skirt breakdown before nearing breakthrough. We'll find out if Barak's gambit was a clever one in five months. Or twelve. Or maybe when the next interim agreement comes. ■

What ails health insurance.

Calculated Risk

By EZEKIEL J. EMANUEL

EVER NOTICE HOW all those billboards advertising managed care companies never seem to include pictures of anyone who looks as if he or she may actually need a doctor? The American population as depicted in managed care advertising seems to consist entirely of young adults, energetic children, and the occasional vigorous senior. Some of those ads also try to attract new enrollees with such perks as free health club memberships—not exactly something the chronically ill can take advantage of. One thing managed care plans usually don't advertise, of course, is that they often limit coverage of drug benefits to discourage chronically ill Medicare recipients from enrolling. And when was the last time you saw a bus go by with a big ad from a health insurance company boasting about its terrific treatment plan for AIDS or mental illness?

There's a reason for this, of course: The fewer sick people a managed care plan has on its rolls, the more profits the company makes. Economists call this "adverse risk selection." Critics of managed care call it the inevitable heartless greed of all for-profit health insurance. But, even if we abolished managed care and replaced it with universal coverage by a single payer, the system would still give doctors, nurses, and hospitals a strong incentive to avoid caring for the sick. Why? Fee-for-service medicine is a proven formula for runaway health-cost inflation. Thus, any future health care system would seek to control costs by paying organizations or physicians a fixed amount of money to care for patients, just as managed care currently does (and as the Clinton health

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care reform plan would have done).

These budgets might well be more generous—a government-run single-payer system could presumably save on advertising, for example—but the incentive structure would remain basically the same. And this financial conundrum can't be resolved by providing good preventive care to ensure that people don't get sick or by managing people well when they do fall ill. Even with optimal precautions, people will develop cancer, heart disease, kidney failure, chronic breathing problems, arthritis, and other ailments. At some point, everyone will need a doctor, an ICU bed, or a visiting nurse. Even not-for-profit managed care plans and hospitals can't pay out more than they take in for very long; even they have an incentive to seek out the healthy and exclude the sick.

Adverse risk selection, then, is here to stay. But what if we could change the equation so that companies actually began to compete for sick patients? What if we could adjust the risks? In fact, health care finance is already beginning to embrace the concept of "risk adjustment." Basically, it's a way to adjust the per capita payments to managed care plans to reflect how costly the care of an insured person is likely to be. A managed care plan would receive more money per month for a patient with colon cancer, for example, than for a generally healthy person. Importantly, the amount to be paid is determined up front, so there is still a lump-sum payment without an incentive to use more services for more money.

To be sure, risk adjustment is not brand-new. For years, Medicare payments have been adjusted based on factors such as a patient's age, sex, and whether he or she lives at home or in an institution. The problem is that, even after taking these variables into account, the adjusted payments do not accurately reflect the costs of treating the individual. Socio-demographic data are not a good proxy for the kinds of illnesses people have and how expensive those illnesses are to treat. For instance, the average costs of being disabled and living in a nursing home because of quadriplegia are much higher than those associated with living in a nursing home owing to dementia or diabetes.

Congress has recognized this problem, and the 1997 Balanced Budget Act mandated that Medicare provide better risk adjustment. Alas, Congress didn't offer any bright ideas about how to do this. Risk adjustment needs to be based on detailed health information. There are various ways to get such information, including surveying patients to assess their health status or recording their medical diagnoses. Patient surveys are not as helpful as diagnoses, in part because patients can easily manipulate the system by giving false or exaggerated answers. And, while Medicare does have good data on diagnoses of patients admitted to hospitals, Medicare is not getting the full picture, because similar information about patients who visit doctors' offices is collected erratically and is unreliable. For example, a patient admitted to a hospital for heart disease could also have emphysema, diabetes, obesity, or high blood pressure—problems that don't show up in the main diagnosis.

Worse, this new method creates its own perverse incentives. HMOs only get the risk-adjusted boost in payments when patients are hospitalized, because only then does the plan get credit for a diagnosis that results in an increase in payment to reflect the anticipated costs of caring for such patients. The result is that managed care plans will have an incentive to hospitalize patients at least once. Those plans that develop high-quality, efficient nonhospital programs, such as home visits from nurses, will be penalized.

This can only be countered by amassing more accurate health information on each patient who visits a doctor, which, in turn, will be used to generate more accurate models that predict future health care costs and can be used to adjust payments to managed care plans. Unfortunately, wiring all doctors' offices with the computers and software to submit diagnoses with bills, establishing central information systems that check the accuracy of the data, managing the databases, and spewing out meaningful statistics will require time and hundreds of millions, or even billions, of dollars. That doesn't even include analyzing the data, building and testing the complex mathematical models for the actual risk adjustment of hundreds of different diseases and combinations of diseases, or addressing privacy concerns.

The good news is that Medicare will soon begin requiring physicians to provide more health information about their patients, the first step toward more sophisticated risk adjustment. Collecting this data has the important added advantage of letting Medicare know what services patients in managed care are actually getting from their doctors, so the agency will be able to monitor more accurately whether patients are being under- or overtreated for various diseases.

BUT MORE ACCURATE risk adjustment is still years away, at best. What can we do in the meantime? One approach, advocated by Joe Newhouse, an economist at Harvard, is called "partial capitation." Essentially, it would pay health plans partially on a per capita basis and partially the old-fashioned fee-for-service way. Plans would not get a dollar for every dollar they spent on health care, but, say, 50 cents for every additional dollar they spent on tests or specialist care. Newhouse says partial capitation has two advantages. First, by paying for services, "it lessens the incentives of plans and providers to select"—i.e. to avoid the sick—"because it reduces the losses on bad risks and the profits on good risks." Second, it also lessens managed care's incentive to refuse tests and referrals. Unfortunately, all the Medicare reforms in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act appear to prohibit partial capitation by requiring managed care plans to take "full financial risk on a prospective basis for the provision of health care services" to Medicare patients.

The government needs to think again about how to stimulate new and better methods of risk adjustment. Indeed, this should be a top priority of those who want a fairer and more efficient health care system. Big investments will now yield more equitable hospitals and doctors who do care for the sick, and, more importantly, will ensure that they have an incentive to enroll and provide the best care to the ill and the disabled. Maybe one day you really will be able to drive down the highway and see health care billboards that boast about having the best care for diabetics or the top-rated arthritis program. When that happens, we will know that the health care system works for the sick as well as it works for everyone else. ■

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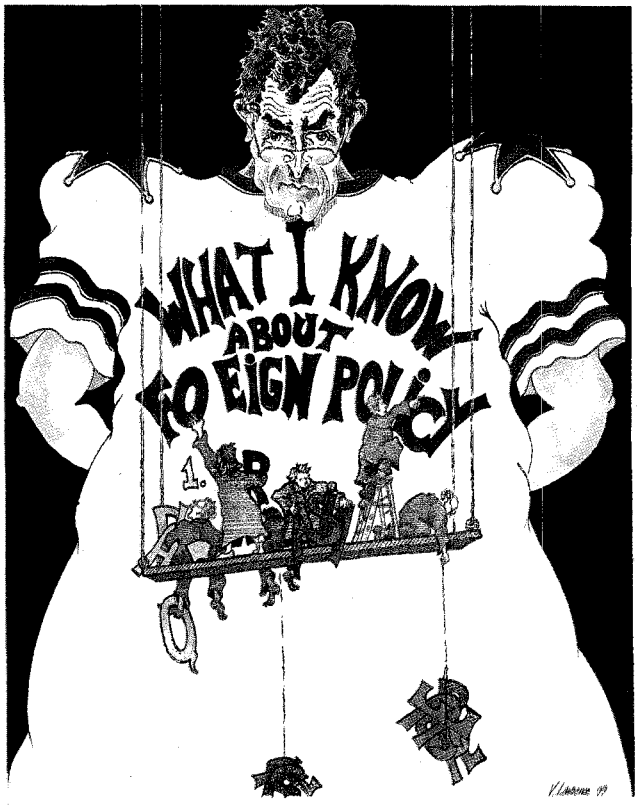
The unrealistic realism of Bush's foreign policy tutors.

Team W.

By JACOB HEILBRUNN

GIVE GEORGE W. BUSH credit for knowing his own limitations. He seems fairly comfortable talking about education or the economy. But when it comes to foreign policy, he has little to say, and when he does talk, he flounders. Turns out that the eldest son of a former president (who lost to Bill Clinton largely because he was seen as obsessed with foreign affairs) doesn't know the difference between Slovakia and Slovenia and thinks the people who live in Greece are known as Grecians. Leading export, Grecian Formula?

Never fear. "I may not be able to tell you exactly the nuances of the East Timorian situation," George W. told *The New York Times* shortly before the East Timorese situation flared out of control, "but I'll ask [Condoleezza] Rice, or I'll ask Paul Wolfowitz, or I'll ask Dick Cheney. I'll ask the people who've had experience." In other words: I'll consult Dad's people. Rice was a Bush National Security Council (NSC) aide on Soviet affairs; Wolfowitz was undersecretary of defense for policy, and Cheney, of course, was secretary of defense. Among the others rounding out Bush's circle of foreign policy advisers is Richard Haass, director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution, who handled Gulf War planning and other Middle East issues for George W.'s dad. And the group's éminence grise is Brent Scowcroft, Poppy's former national security adviser. Thus, if you want to know what George W. would do in foreign affairs, you have to know what this group of people thinks.



George W. Bush by Vint Lawrence for The New Republic

One way to start defining their worldview is to look at the story of why Scowcroft first brought the quietly brainy Rice into the Bush administration. The daughter of two prominent black educators in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, Rice flourished despite the oppression of the Deep South by applying herself to rigorous academic work and the study of classical piano. At age 15, she entered the University of Denver, where she dropped piano and gravitated to international relations; her faculty mentor was former Czech diplomat Josef Korbel—Madeleine Albright's father.

Under Korbel's tutelage, Rice developed a passion for Russian studies and absorbed "realist" notions of international politics. She told me, "I read early on and was influenced by [Hans] Morgenthau," who wrote the realist bible *Politics Among Nations*. Morgenthau didn't believe that nations should go on ideological crusades or attempt to promote human rights in other countries. He saw the cold war not so much as a contest between communism and democracy but as something more antiseptic—a struggle between two rival continental nations who simply had clashing national interests.

Scowcroft first encountered Rice at a 1986 meeting on arms control held at Stanford University. Among the assembled experts, Scowcroft recalls, "was this little slip of a girl. Boy, she held her own. I said, 'That's someone I've got to get to know.'" Scowcroft was impressed not only by Rice's personal story but also by her ideas—particularly her realist approach to the cold war. "There were two kinds of people in Russian studies," Scowcroft told me; "those who thought the Soviets could do no good, and those who thought they were misunderstood liberals. She saw where we could cooperate and where we could not." Morgenthau would have approved; Scowcroft definitely did. By 1989, Rice was a member of the NSC staff, helping Scowcroft plan the American response to the demise of the Soviet Union.

To the degree that Scowcroft and his acolytes help shape a George W. Bush foreign policy, then, it will be a neorealist policy. A second Bush administration would hardly withdraw from the world, as the neoisolationists who now dominate the Republican majority in Congress would. It would instead favor U.S. engagement in the world, with force if necessary, but only to protect vital (usually economic) interests. No more moral or humanitarian interventions; the Bush realists' chief concern would be the old Nixon-Kissinger game of maintaining a balance of power among the great nations rather than vindicating the rights of the small nations—much less those of oppressed individuals.

American credibility and military power are great, the Bushies believe, but they are also easily dissipated, so they must be preserved for only those cases where our vital interests are at stake. Cool, realistic diplomats are prepared to try to negotiate with any type of regime whenever the national interest calls for it; the last thing that should ever be done is to turn emotional or "demonize" another foreign leader, no matter how nasty he may be.

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With that in mind, consider the George W. team's views on the Kosovo intervention. Scowcroft was so annoyed by the Clinton administration's move into Kosovo that he almost seemed to sympathize with Serbia. "We have taken a true thug, Milosevic, and demonized him," he said. "It's led us astray ... Milosevic happens to be the strongest of the thugs down there.... Now we're in a very unfortunate circumstance of presiding over reverse ethnic cleansing."

Another Bush adviser, explaining why George W.'s hesitation about supporting the Kosovo operation was justified, added, "We don't look at the world the way Gore does. We don't believe in this emotional stuff. We don't believe in sending troops all over the place.... It's very Kiplingesque. If you don't buy Kipling anymore, I'm not sure you buy this humanitarian stuff." Another advisor says, "The Clinton doctrine sounds almost as though we would intervene anywhere in the world when we didn't like the human rights practices of a country. This is an open-ended and terrifying prospect."

Indeed, one of the only issues on which the Bushies seem to agree with Clinton is China, where the president has himself practiced a kind of realpolitik premised on the economically motivated appeasement of a dictatorial government. Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, has made Chinese membership in the World Trade Organization virtually the summum bonum of American policy in Asia. Similarly, Bush seems to have no plans to antagonize Beijing over issues such as political prisoners. "George W.," Scowcroft explains, "is trying to keep his feet out of the quicksand. He's trying to stay balanced on it. Look at *The Weekly Standard*. China is their bête noire. It's their response to the end of the cold war. China is not Stalinist Russia nor Hitler's Germany.... We should see if there's a way that giant can be ushered into the world as a great power without the trauma of Germany or Japan." Rice adds, "The Chinese Communists are living on borrowed time; economic liberalization is going to create pressure for political freedom."

BUSH-STYLE REALISM sounds tough-minded and consistent. But just how realistic is it in practice? Is it actually true, as Haass remarks in the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, that "order is more fundamental than justice"? Or is a measure of moralism in U.S. foreign policy not only inevitable, given our democratic political culture, but also desirable, since unjust political arrangements have a way of losing legitimacy and, eventually, collapsing?

The paradigmatic exercise in Bush-Scowcroft neorealism was the Gulf war. For George W.'s dad and his national security adviser, the fight to expel Saddam Hussein was justifiable insofar as it was necessary to wrest the oil resources of the Persian Gulf from Saddam's control. But the Bush administration shrank from a campaign to topple Saddam, fearing that the breakup of Iraq would destabilize the whole region. Moral arguments for carrying the crusade to Baghdad simply didn't sway the Bushies. It may have been sad that Iraq's cruelly oppressed Kurds and Shiites were left to deal with the reincarnation of Hitler by themselves, but what did that have to do with America's own national interests? "We feared, rightly, that [invading Iraq] risked transforming what had been a quick and clear victory into a prolonged and costly quagmire," Haass wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* last year. Besides, the Bushies were in a hurry to move on to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which they mistakenly viewed as the central source of instability in the region. Their formula was to pressure Israel into making a deal with the Palestinians, who had only days earlier celebrated Saddam's scud missile attacks on Tel Aviv. It wasn't too realistic, and it failed (something to keep in mind as George W. indulges in the usual campaign rhetoric about Jerusalem being Israel's true capital).

THE COUNTERARGUMENT TO the Bushies' approach to the Gulf war was, of course, that their effort to maintain a long-term balance of power might actually have been more destabilizing than the alternative. A decisive stroke to oust Saddam would have eliminated a regime bent on menacing its neighbors with weapons of mass destruction. It would have sent a needed signal to the Arab world that the United States would never tolerate such a state in the region again (a signal that might have reassured the Israelis). And it certainly would have spared the constant drain on American diplomatic capital and military resources that has resulted from the subsequent necessity of "containing" Saddam through frustrating weapons inspections, sanctions, and occasional military attacks.

Similar conceptual difficulties plagued the Bush approach to the decay of the Soviet Union. As Eastern Europe shook off Moscow's grip and separatist sentiment grew among the USSR's constituent republics, the Bush administration seemed almost sorry to see the Soviet Union go. Its instincts were to hold the Kremlin's realm together so as not to upset the existing geopolitical order. To be sure, there were sound reasons to be concerned about the stability of the nuclear-armed Soviet Union in the delicate year of 1989, and about who or what might rise to power if Mikhail Gorbachev were to fall.

But, in hindsight, the Bush national security team was often too cautious and lacking in imagination to do much more than react—belatedly—to events. When Russia's Boris Yeltsin, then still credible as a vigorous reformer, began to challenge the communist monopoly on power, the Bush administration sided with Gorbachev. During Yeltsin's first visit to the United States in 1989, the Bushies intentionally snubbed him, obliging him to enter the White House not through the front entrance but via the West Wing basement. Moreover, Rice told Yeltsin that he could meet with Scowcroft but not with Bush himself. As Scowcroft recalled in his memoir (written with President Bush), "Condi [Rice] said that if he did not plan to keep his appointment with me, he might as well go back to his hotel." (Bush later dropped in on Scowcroft's meeting with Yeltsin.)

For her part, Rice rejects the notion that the Bush administration stuck with Gorbachev for too long. "[Gorbachev] was doing everything we wanted," she says. "When, precisely, would you have pulled your support?" Fair enough. But the Bush administration's emphasis was more on propping up Gorbachev than on picking the right time to dump him. Bush made his famous "Chicken Kiev" speech to the Ukrainian

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parliament, warning it against "suicidal nationalism." The Ukrainians greeted the speech with contempt and peacefully separated from Russia. While occupied with Iraq, the Bush administration turned a blind eye to Gorbachev's brutal attempt to crush a freedom movement in Lithuania and generally hesitated to recognize the Baltic states' declarations of independence—even though the United States had never recognized their incorporation into the Soviet Union.

The Bush-Scowcroft approach was much the same in the Balkans. In 1991, U.S. power and prestige in the world were at a new high, thanks to the Gulf war victory. But the Bush administration spent none of this capital on a serious program to save the former Yugoslavia from disaster, letting the feckless Europeans run the Western response as Slobodan Milosevic whipped up ethnic hatred in the region. To the extent that the Bush administration did get involved, it was to signal that it wanted to hold Yugoslavia together. When the mass killings began in Bosnia, the Bush administration stood aside.

Rice admits that the Bush administration fumbled in Yugoslavia, but, falling back on the logic and rhetoric of realism, she defends its policies toward the Soviet Union. She says there was no need to rock any boats: "When you have so much power, you have to be careful not to get in the way of historical events that are going your way. Too heavy a hand by the U.S. might have provoked a counterreaction." She has a point, at least with regard to Bush's skillful handling of German reunification. But, given the history, it is ironic that Rice and others in the George W. camp are now charging the Clinton-Gore administration with clinging too long to the corrupt and enfeebled Yeltsin.

THE WORLDVIEW OF Bush's Republican predecessor, Ronald Reagan, was anything but "realistic." Reagan firmly believed that the cold war was a struggle between good and evil; he demonized the "evil empire" unabashedly and, as it turned out, rather effectively. His anti-Communist rhetoric, coupled with a U.S. arms buildup, attacked the Soviets at their weakest points: political legitimacy and technological backwardness. The Reagan policy caused handwringing among the foreign policy establishment. But rather than leading to nuclear war, as so many warned at the time that it would, Reagan's moralistic crusade unsettled the Soviets. They became willing to talk seriously about internal reform and external peacemaking, which, in the context of a system based on internal terror and external aggression, spelled its doom. Instead of nuclear holocaust, Reagan helped bring about the largest single explosion of human liberation in history.

The lesson, then, of Reagan's foreign policy is that internal political change by our adversaries, not mere diplomatic blandishments or geopolitical balancing by the United States, is necessary for achieving American security and a safer world. The Reagan approach still has a few advocates in the Republican sphere, chiefly in the pages of the *Standard* and, at times, in the speeches of Senator John McCain, one of George W.'s rivals for the presidency, who has called for a tougher approach to North Korea and bucked his party to support the Kosovo campaign. Indeed, the Clinton-Gore response to issues such as Kosovo seems to owe more to the Reagan model than the prospective Bush approach does.

Within the current crop of George W.'s advisers, the person most resembling a Reaganite is Wolfowitz, who served in senior positions in both the Reagan and Bush administrations. For instance, Wolfowitz has always been skeptical about an overly soft version of engagement with China. In 1982, when he was serving as the State Department's director of policy planning, Wolfowitz wrote a paper attacking Secretary of State Alexander Haig for caving in to pressure from Beijing during negotiations with Taiwan over arms sales. During the Bush administration, Wolfowitz pleaded with then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell to support lifting the arms embargo imposed on the Bosnians. Since leaving government, Wolfowitz has also written op-eds in support of military action against the Serbs. In TNR's own pages, Wolfowitz has told of his futile efforts to convince Bush to overthrow Saddam at the end of the Gulf war. Wolfowitz now advocates aggressive support for the Iraqi opposition as a means of ousting Saddam, whom he brands a "war criminal" (see "Rising Up," December 7, 1998).

IT WILL BE interesting to see how Wolfowitz fares in the George W. campaign and whether, if George W. is elected, Wolfowitz's neo-Reaganism will have an impact on the new president's thinking. For the old Reaganite thinking reflects not only a different logic than neorealism but also a different attitude. Reaganites tend to see the bold exercise of American power not in static cost-benefit terms, but in dynamic risk-reward terms. Yes, it's risky to confront enemies in the world, especially militarily. But it can sometimes bring change that radically lowers the long-term dangers to American interests and values.

At times, Rice hints that she gets this. In her excellent chronicle of Bush's European diplomacy, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* (cowritten with Philip Zelikow), Rice takes the view that, when the Warsaw Pact disintegrated, "Ronald Reagan's memorable words rang true. It was indeed a 'sad experiment' practiced on a huge and helpless population." In a recent interview in *National Review*, Rice gave credit for the fall of communism to Reagan's unflinching language about its evils. Perhaps she and Wolfowitz could make common cause, at least on certain issues.

Still, the dominant theme of George W.'s camp is neorealism. Despite all the evidence that Reagan's policies toward the Soviets were actually based on a far sounder assessment of the USSR's intentions and capabilities than anything the foreign policy establishment produced, Scowcroft calls him a "romantic." And the neorealist attitude is dour and pessimistic—not to say defeatist. Haass even goes so far as to suggest that "as power diffuses around the world, America's position relative to others will inevitably erode." Thus, he writes, "The proper goal for American foreign policy ... is to encourage a multipolarity characterized by cooperation and concert rather than competition and conflict." A multipolarity? What kind of a rallying cry is that for someone who wants to be the next commander-in-chief? ■

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The End of Meritocracy.

Should the SAT Ac

Yes.

By NATHAN GLAZER

THIS MONTH, THE Educational Testing Service (ETS), creator and marketer of the SAT—the most widely used test of academic ability and the key measure that colleges and universities take into account when making admissions decisions—announced that it is developing a "Strivers" score, an adjustment of the SAT score to take into account a student's socioeconomic background and race, increasing the scores of those whose socioeconomic background or race is considered to put them at a disadvantage. Colleges and universities will be able to use the new Strivers score, if they wish, in making their admissions decisions. The ETS will offer institutions both a "race-blind" model, which includes only social, economic, and educational factors, and a model that also takes into account race—that is, whether the applicant is black, Hispanic, or Native American. ETS's chief competitor, the American College Testing Program, which produces a test used by many institutions instead of the SAT, will be developing a similar model.

Clearly, these developments are a response to the crumbling of the legal support that colleges and universities have relied upon to justify the almost universal practice among selective institutions of giving some kind of preference to black and Hispanic students. And, just as surely, critics of racial preference in college admissions will not be mollified by the new Strivers score and other, similar new strategies. If the formula using race is factored into admissions decisions, the new procedure will be just as legally vulnerable as the existing formal or informal preferences for race that have been struck down by a federal appeals court ruling in a University of Texas case and are now being challenged in an important University of Michigan case. Nor, one would think, would the new approach survive in the courts of the states—California and Washington—where popular referenda have forbidden the states and their agencies, including colleges and universities, to take race into account when making admissions decisions.

And, if the Strivers score without the race factor is used, present statistical patterns show that it will be less effective in identifying black students who may qualify for admission than the score that includes race as part of the formula. For race is indeed a factor in reducing test scores, independent of family wealth, education, and the other socioeconomic factors. It has a particularly strong independent effect in reducing scores for blacks, and, for most institutions, increasing the number of black students is a higher priority than increasing the number of Hispanic students.

What is most striking about the development of the Strivers score is the evidence it gives us of the strength of the commitment to maintaining a higher number of black and Hispanic students in selective institutions than would qualify on the basis of academic promise alone. It is not only the testing agencies that show this commitment. They are, after all, responding to their customers, the educational institutions, whose presidents and administrations universally support racial preference in admissions. They may call it "diversity," a softer and more benign term, but what diversity in practice means is more blacks than they would admit under admissions procedures that didn't take race into account. Writing in *National Review*, Stephan Thernstrom, a strong critic of racial preferences, informs us with disapproval that "[William] Bowen and [Derek] Bok argue [in their study of racial preference *The Shape of the River*] that administrators barred from using racial double-standards in admissions will elect to lower standards for all applicants so as to secure enough non-Asian minorities in the student body."

While this is not quite their position—it is, rather, that administrators will do what they can to maintain the number of black students even when legal bans on taking race into

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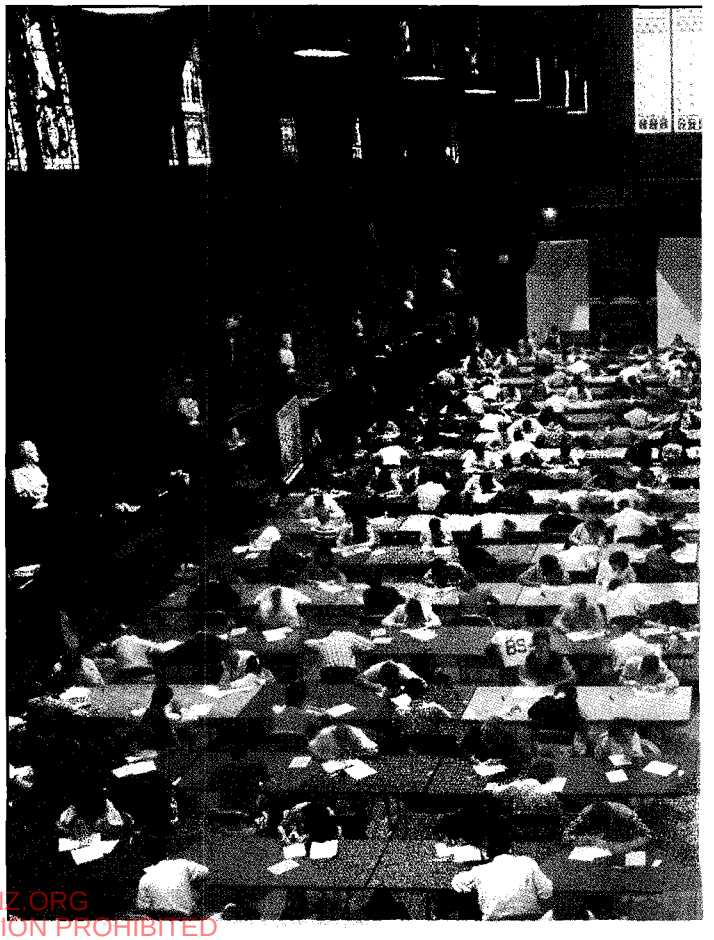

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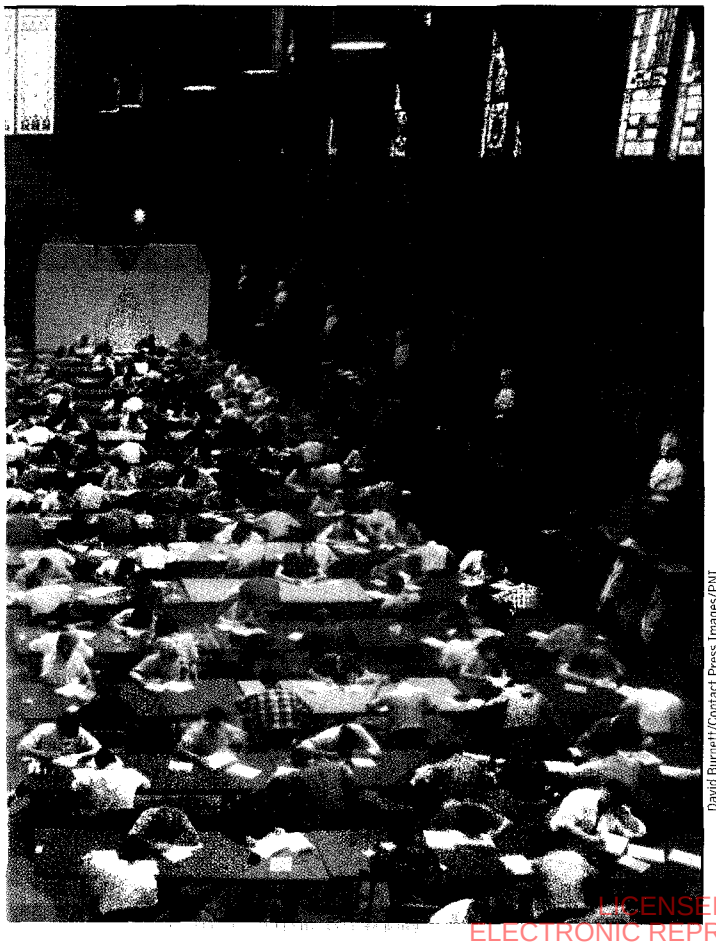
:ount for Race?

No.

By Abigail Thernstrom

The educational testing service (ETS) calls them "strivers." They could just as well be called the "but for" kids: kids who would have done better on their SATs *but for* . . . their racial or ethnic identities, their families' income, the quality of their schools, and so forth. Or so ETS believes. These and other circumstances call for college admissions officers to treat these students' scores differently than they otherwise would, the company suggests. Never mind that selective colleges already take such factors into account when weighing student applications. That inevitably subjective process is inadequate, ETS apparently believes. Schools with high admissions standards need further instruction and a tool to help read scores properly. "A combined score of 1000 on the SATs is not always a 1000," Anthony Carnevale, an ETS vice president who heads the Strivers project, has said. "When you look at a striver who gets a 1000, you're looking at someone who really performs at a 1200."

The students ETS has in mind are those who have done better than their demographic profile would predict. Carnevale suggests the low score is, in effect, a false negative, but ETS has evidently decided to leave the actual process of readjusting scores up to the schools themselves. It will provide the unadjusted score and a statistical formula that colleges can use to convert it to the Strivers number, should they so choose.



David Burnett/Contact Press Images/PNI

Or so it seems. In the wake of negative press, the company released an obfuscating memo denying any current "program or service based upon the Strivers research." But it did not rule out offering a "program or service" once its final report is completed—in about two months. "Researchers" have been "studying the effect of considering additional background information" in order to "provide a richer context for candidates' scores," the memo explained. "ETS is committed to continuing a dialogue about fairness and equity in higher education."

That ongoing "dialogue" has largely been prompted, of course, by the end of the use of racial preferences in admissions decisions in public higher education in Texas, California, and Washington state. Although University of Michigan President Lee Bollinger recently declared diversity to be "as vital as teaching Shakespeare or mathematics," the University of Michigan's own race-based admissions processes will soon be on trial in a federal district court. Suits against other elite colleges (all of which sort students on the basis of race and ethnicity) are sure to follow. But ETS may be riding to the schools' partial rescue with a formula that gives a pseudo-scientific imprimatur to setting lower SAT standards for "disadvantaged" students.

ETS broadens the definition of disadvantage beyond race and ethnicity and is said to be working on two formulas. One will factor in race. The other will reportedly focus on only such variables as the employment status of the student's mother and the kinds of electrical appliances and number of books in the student's home, as reported—accurately or inaccurately—by the student. Thus, the University of California and the handful of other schools that are no longer allowed to make race-based admissions decisions will be able to use it. A formal acknowledgment that disadvantage comes in all colors and many forms would certainly be a step forward. But not a very big one. Expanding the universe of preferential admits does not solve the basic problem. ETS is simply adding more variables to a victimology index and reinforcing the already-too-widespread belief that demography is des-

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Abigail Thernstrom is the coauthor of *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*, and, more recently, "Reflections on *The Shape of the River*," *UCLA Law Review*, June 1999.

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GLAZER *continued from page 26*

account exist—the fact is that it is not administrators alone who will do this in the effort to evade the clear effect of the elimination of race preference. The Texas legislature voted that the state university should consider the top ten percent of the graduating class of every Texas high school eligible for the state university, a far more radical lowering of the standards for eligibility than any university administrator would have proposed.

Even more remarkably, the Regents of the University of California, who had earlier voted that race could not be taken into account in admissions decisions, have voted that the top four percent of the graduates of every California high school should be eligible for admission to the state university system! The Texas and California actions both radically expand the number of black and Hispanic students eligible for the state universities, for in both states there are many high schools almost exclusively Hispanic and black in composition that would not be capable of producing students eligible for the top branches of the state university without the new policies.

The faculties of colleges and universities have not played much of a role in all this. Faculty members critical of racial preferences berate their colleagues for not speaking up—indeed, faculty members rarely speak up when a controversial issue does not affect them directly. But recent surveys show that the critics of racial preference will not get much support from university faculties. Although a recent survey of 34,000 faculty members conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute of the University of California at Los Angeles does not ask the racial preference question directly, it does ask whether "promoting diversity leads to the admission of too many underprepared students." Only 28 percent of respondents agreed. And 90.5 percent of respondents agreed with the following statement, admittedly not much more controversial than arguing the virtues of motherhood: "A racially/ethnically diverse student body enhances the educational experience of all students."

Thus college and university faculty and administrators, state legislatures, and the ruling political bodies in charge of public universities all seem to have a commitment to maintaining the number of black and Hispanic students receiving higher education, and, bluntly, are willing to take evasive action to do it. They will use substitutes for race—and, if one substitute does not work, they will look for others. If focusing on applicants who live in a poor neighborhood doesn't help—perhaps there are too many Asians in one poor California neighborhood or another—they will try focusing on applicants who live in housing projects. One way or another, the commitment to enrolling more blacks than would qualify based on academic criteria alone will be pursued.

I believe this commitment, however cloaked in subterfuge it may be, is a valid one. True, it has been clear from the beginning of affirmative action that the majority of the American population—and even a very substantial part of the black population—does not like the idea of making an individual's fate dependent on his or her race or ethnic background. We are all, in principle, in favor of a race-blind society, and clearly that is an important principle, one that we all hope to realize in time. But it has turned out that the use of strict race-blind admissions procedures will radically reduce the number of black students, and in lesser measure the number of Hispanic students, in the selective institutions of higher education—key institutions of our society. This can only serve to further divide non-Asian minorities and whites and to further postpone the day when we can achieve a truly race-blind, fully integrated society. And this is simply too high a price to pay for adhering to the principle of race-blind admissions today.

If, then, one accepts that admitting more non-Asian minorities than would make the cut through academic criteria alone is a legitimate goal, the Strivers score is not such a terrible way to achieve it. The new score, which is simply an adjustment of the actual SAT score, is based on the common observation that students from wealthier and more educated families, from well-to-do suburbs, from high schools with better students, and the like, will on average do better on the SAT than students from poorer and less-educated families and from worse high schools—the circumstances of a disproportionate number of minorities. It stands to reason that a student from a materially and educationally impoverished environment who does fairly well on the SAT and better than other students who come from a similar environment is probably stronger than the unadjusted score indicates. In the past, those colleges and universities whose admissions staffs and procedures permitted individual evaluation of applications took such factors into account informally. With the new Strivers score, they will have a statistical tool that includes no fewer than 14 characteristics that are expected to affect SAT scores. It will, of course, be up to individual institutions to decide whether they want to make use of the Strivers adjustment, just as individual institutions now determine how much weight the SAT score should have in the admissions decision. Still, the Strivers score may make what was essentially an intuitive system more rational.

Of course, there's a strong possibility that it may not survive the inevitable legal challenges. It also remains to be seen just how effective the new approach will be at maintaining or increasing the number of blacks and Hispanic students in our colleges and universities. For instance, it's possible that the main effect may be instead to increase the number of Asians, in which case the effectiveness of the Strivers adjustment would undoubtedly be reviewed.

But even if the Strivers score approach does not succeed, its introduction has highlighted the need for institutions under legal attack to improve the informal and messy procedures that they have been using to raise their enrollment of minority students. Perhaps we can bury the overt emphasis on race while trying to reach the same objective; perhaps race can become the dirty little secret we are trying to take account of without directly saying so. Hypocrisy in the matter may be no minor gain. But it is clear that, for some time, if we are to maintain the appearance of being one nation when by many measures we are, in fact, two, a pure race-blind policy will be so strongly resisted that racial preference will by some means prevail. ■

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THERNSTROM *continued from page 27*

tiny. And once you start factoring in variables that lead to disadvantage, where do you stop? Should you take into account an applicant's birth order? Her relationship with her parents? The psychologists haven't even gotten into the act yet.

Of course, literally no one believes that SAT scores alone should determine who gets into which schools. And, in fact, no college entirely ignores the "context" that ETS wants to stress. But does ETS really want high schools telling a black kid in the Bronx that no one expects him to do as well as the Vietnamese immigrant in his class? Should a teacher say to a white student from a low-income family, "I'll count your C in math as an A? You come to the test with a disadvantage; I understand."

Across the nation, states are getting serious about promoting high academic standards in their elementary and secondary schools. But, in Massachusetts and elsewhere, anti-testing voices have argued that it is simply unfair to expect suburban skills in urban schools with high concentrations of non-Asian minority kids. Teachers, critics say, are being asked to achieve the impossible. Moreover, the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education has recently weighed in with an attack on all high-stakes testing as potentially discriminatory.

Without doubt, school is easier for children who grow up in affluent and educated households. And yet, without tough tests and uniformly high expectations, the academic performance of black and Hispanic children—which, on average, is woefully behind that of whites and Asians—is unlikely to improve. ETS is proposing to send the worst possible message to these kids: If you start out in life with less, we expect less of you—today, tomorrow, maybe forever. The die has been cast. The fix is in.

The students who meet high academic expectations in the kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade years are likely to do well on the SATs, and for most students those tests are excellent predictors of how they will fare in college. As a consequence (as Carnevale surely knows), a score of 1000 is simply not the same as 1200; the lower-scoring student is less academically prepared. Even a score of 1200 means a rough academic ride for students at universities such as Princeton and Stanford, where the median SAT score exceeds 1400.

If elite schools want to become nonselective, or if they want to choose their matriculants randomly from the pool of applicants with scores over, say, 1000, who could object on grounds of principle? Needless to say, their fancy professors and devoted alumni might not like the idea. The physics professor who is a Nobel laureate generally wants to teach high-powered students, and the alumni like the prestige that accompanies highly selective admissions. A more random system would let in plenty of strivers, but the schools themselves would change. Students who were less prepared would require less rigorous courses—unless the colleges suddenly became willing to flunk them out.

ETS is obviously trying to suggest otherwise. Strivers (by definition) have tried harder and thus can do as well as the kid with the much higher SAT, the testing service implies. The disadvantaged student with a score of 1000 will do just as well as the privileged one who got 1200.

Well, maybe, in some cases. But the notion rests on a questionable assumption—namely that a score of 1000, when it beats a racial or other group norm, represents extraordinary effort. That may not be the case. Perhaps the student from an impoverished family who seems to have beaten the SAT odds is simply good at taking standardized tests. Or perhaps her parents have intangible qualities that the ETS formula has failed to capture. It is even possible that she didn't try hard enough—that she is underperforming relative to her intellectual gifts. Her score may reflect academic talent, not hard work. In fact, if ETS is serious about finding the kids who really "strive," it might make much more sense to look at grade point averages, adjusted for the difficulty of the courses taken. Arguably, it is the student with a low SAT score but a high GPA who has demonstrated dedication and perseverance—true grit.

In addition, there is no evidence that students who outscore peers with the same demographic characteristics will experience exceptional intellectual growth in college. In general, for unknown reasons, black students, for instance, earn substantially lower grades in college than their SATs would lead us to predict. (This is one of the buried but depressing facts contained in William Bowen and Derek Bok's pro-affirmative-action book, *The Shape of the River*.) Another recent study, which focused on University of San Diego undergraduates, looked not only at blacks and Hispanics but also at the records of students who attended impoverished high schools, came from low-income families, or lived in neighborhoods with few college graduates. These disadvantaged youths also underperformed, by the measure of their SAT scores.

Most important, why should the measure of achievement be a group norm? Asians do better than whites on math SATs; should whites who outperform the white group norm be given special preference? Should a high-scoring Asian be rejected from MIT if she beats the non-Asian competition but scores lower than Asians in general? In fact, both Asians and Jews will suffer under any leveling scheme that penalizes applicants who come from more prosperous and better-educated homes. These two groups are strikingly overrepresented on elite campuses today, precisely because they score so high on the SATs. Asians constitute only four percent of the population, but they represent almost a quarter of all students scoring above 750 on the math SATs, with the result that they make up nearly one-fifth of the student body at Harvard and a quarter or more at MIT and Cal Tech. It appears that the end of racial preferences in California has primarily benefited Asians.

ETS is perfectly right, of course, to say that race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status correlate with SAT scores. And SAT scores, the company should add, correlate with college performance. Instead of trafficking in group stereotypes, endlessly tinkering with scores, giving extra points for this or that sort of disadvantage, and pretending lower-scoring students are competitive when they are not, why not just educate the kids? Does ETS believe good schools are an impossible dream? Shame on it, if it does. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Around Several Worlds

FILMS CAN DEPRESS us about the future of mankind—not when the films are bad but when they are good. The best foreign pictures do so much to unite us with exotic people, to show us the linkages under the differences and to render the differences comprehensible, that global harmony should be on the rise. Ozu didn't make his films as "explanations" of Japan, nor did Ray in India, nor Kiarostami in Iran, nor Zhang Yimou in China; their films are artworks, not tracts. Still, anyone who has seen their work must afterward, when reading political news from those countries, feel some sense of being trapped in great concrete channels irrelevant to the minutiae of every day. Most political news on TV and in newspapers tends to treat countries as slabs of dominant qualities; but film particularizes. Every art can do this, of course: but one of the special benefits of film is its immediate immediacy. Film, in its hundred years, could have made the globe smaller.

Still, it is hard to see that this has happened. Obviously it is a reductive sentimentality to think in terms of One World, which was a much-mouthed catch-phrase in the 1950s, but film might have been a means of appreciating the many worlds. Often, after good foreign films, I have felt that possibility—and then a pang caused by stasis, complacent stasis.

The latest cause of the pang is **West Beirut** (Cowboy). This is a first film by Ziad Doueiri, born in Beirut in 1963, who had his professional education in the United States, worked here as a cinematographer, then went home to make this feature about his memories of growing up during the civil war in his city. His film reminds us yet again—casually, even humorously—that international tensions tend to make "other" people faceless and that film can give them faces.

The year is 1975. The city is split: East Beirut is controlled by Christians, West Beirut by Muslims. Militias fight. All that Doueiri wants to show is that two Muslim boys and a Christian girl had their adolescences in that situation. The two boys hate their (French) high school together, get into mischief together, daydream about women together, tease and quarrel like kids anywhere, except that some of the buildings around them are wrecked, barricades impede their wanderings, and the sound of guns often spackles the air; and the girl tags along as a sort of appendage that they like. The parents of Tarek, the bigger of the two boys, are greatly worried, naturally, about the civil strife, but Tarek is enjoying the fact that his school is closed. He has some adventures that wouldn't occur in normal situations, including his stumble into a brothel patronized by both Muslims and Christians, but Doueiri, who says that the picture is largely autobiographical, emphasizes that Tarek and his friends manage to live in their own world, focused on their own interests.

Doueiri directs in a close, neo-realistic, almost brusque way, with a number of hand-held shots, and though he is not remotely ambitious for the lyric, he manages at times to suggest Truffaut—the kidding around of the two boys, a sequence on bicycles, the final freeze-frame. He gets warm performances from Joseph Bou Nassar and Carmen Lebbos as Tarek's parents, and the director's younger brother, Rami, plays Tarek as an engaging scamp. Mohamad Chamas is pleasant as his pal. A press note tells us that Chamas, an orphan, has not done any acting since this film and currently lives in a shack in a refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut.

Doueiri had a different central aim, but he must have known that his film would bring Lebanon a few thousand miles closer.

Speaking of connections abroad: Kazuo Miyagawa died in August, at 91, in his native city of Kyoto. His name may be little known outside Japan, but his cinematography has enthralled millions. *Rashomon* and *Yojimbo* (directed by Kurosawa), *Sansho the Bailiff* and *Ugetsu Monogatori* (Mizoguchi), and *Floating Weeds* (Ozu) are only a few instances of Miyagawa's camera mastery.

I met him in New York in 1981 and saw him again in Kyoto in 1985. We spent a day together, with an interpreter, and he showed me around his city fondly and proudly, including the spot where he had made his first shot of his first film in 1935. He had begun his career as a lab technician in a film studio, and I asked him how he got the job. He chuckled. "The studio had a baseball team," he said. "I was a good second baseman."

Hugh Grant had been away for a while before this year, but it's already time for him to be careful. **Mickey Blue Eyes** (Warner Bros.), a comedy-romance, comes along only a couple of months after *Notting Hill*, a comedy-romance. His co-star in the earlier picture, Julia Roberts, has herself delivered a similar double-barreled blast this summer, but at least she makes some attempt at variety in her roles. Grant doesn't. Of course, the same product served and serves a number of stars very well, but Grant, for all his good looks and stammering charm, is not in himself an infinitely explorable star. He does manage to suggest, with his well-bred Englishness, that there is more to the man he is playing than there appears to be, but even Ronald Colman and Herbert Marshall, somewhat comparable actors, rang changes on their Mayfair-for-American-consumption personae. Grant is becoming a dish we can taste when we see it on the menu.

He is not helped by the script or by the director of *Mickey Blue Eyes*. The screenplay by Adam Scheinman and Robert Kuhn is built on that old reliable, an unlikely juxtaposition: in this case an Oxonian Englishman in New York gets entangled with the Mafia. The dialogue is stock stuff, the plot complications go past farcical façade into glimpses of backstage carpentry. The director, Kelly Makin, most of whose previous experience was in TV, doesn't know much about acting. He doesn't know when to tighten what Grant is doing or how to keep the leading woman, Jeanne Tripplehorn, from painting with too broad a brush. I expected that James Caan, as her mafioso father, might give us a mature version of his excellent and underrated performance in *The Godfather*, but his performance here is slurring and imprecise.

Grant plays an auctioneer at a Sotheby-like art dealer. He falls in love with a young schoolteacher who doesn't want him to meet her family, which turns out to be a family in another sense. When he does meet them, her father and friends, all caricatures, welcome him happily and begin to use his art auctions as a medium for money laundering. If that synopsis was presented to producers, it's understand-

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able that they were keen. But almost everything that happens thereafter isn't good enough.

And with *Mickey Blue Eyes*, as with *The Godfather* and all its progeny on screen and TV, I couldn't help imagining what it's like to be an Italian-American watching this picture. ■

On editing Ralph Ellison

The Riffer's Muse

By JOHN F. CALLAHAN

NOT ALL POSTHUMOUS works of literature were intended to see the light of day. Although a writer's final wish in the matter is an extremely powerful fiat, it does not always constitute the final authority. In some cases, the disobedience of posterity is all to the good: *The Trial* and *The Castle* were published posthumously in defiance of their author's express wish that they be destroyed, and so was the *Aeneid*. Like Tolstoi's unhappy family, not every posthumous work is alike. Some of these books are more fortunate and more deserving than others. Posthumous works must be considered individually, not generally.

When an author abandons one work to pursue another, and dies without ever returning to the unfinished manuscript, there is a valid question about its proper disposition. But when an unfinished work has been its author' s chief preoccupation, and when the author has struggled to finish it, and clearly has anticipated publication only to have his efforts cut short by death—in such circumstances, literary executors have a responsibility to bring the work-in-progress to publication, even though they cannot know precisely what the writer would have done about each and every particular. In such cases, not to edit and not to publish would amount to a heartless betrayal of the writer's best intentions and efforts.

Ralph Ellison worked on his second novel for some forty years. Although he wrote dozens of essays, speeches, and reviews during the four decades after the appearance of *Invisible Man* in 1952, the novel was his primary labor. He was working on it at the end of his life when a fatal illness seized him and and then killed him less than two weeks after it was diagnosed. There is no question but that Ellison was not about to give up on the work to which he had given half his life. He certainly foresaw the work's publication, and he expected to oversee its publication himself.

Ellison's work on *Invisible Man* provides a pertinent clue to his working habits. His letters to his friend Albert Murray reveal that he had cut 200 hundred pages from the first full draft of that novel by April 1951, and then worked with his editor Albert Erskine, reading the manuscript out loud, editing, and making corrections in preparation for the page proofs, which he finished at the end of December 1951. There is no reason to believe that he had different plans for his second novel. In 1994 Ellison made a significant comment to David Remnick in an interview two months before his death on April 16, 1994: "there will be something very soon," he promised.

Did he hope to have something final, or did he hope to put the fragments of his novel-in-progress sufficiently in order that he and his editor could begin crafting a coherent volume from the enormous mass of manuscripts? It is impossible to know. I do know that Joe Fox, the Random House editor assigned to Ellison after Albert Erskine's death in 1993, had not seen a page of manuscript. I know, too, that the condition of the manuscripts was such that someone needed to step in while Ellison was alive to discuss suggestions about what was publishable from the many manuscripts that he had produced in the forty years of work on the book.

And then his death left us with a pile of manuscripts seriously in need of organization and culling, and with a pile of "if onlys." If only Ellison had lived long enough at least to have settled on a definite sequence for the parts and fragments of his work. If only he had left instructions detailing what he wanted done with any or all of his manuscripts. But he did none of these things. His last days and hours were given over to the fundamentals of departing and dying. He was in and out of consciousness from soon after his entry into the hospital until his release, when he fell into a coma for good.

Given Ellison's hopes and ambitions for his book, and the narrative power of much that he did manage to complete, it was imperative for someone (in Ellison's words in *Invisible Man*) "to slip into the breaks and look around." I did so, at Fanny Ellison's request. I also did so knowing that Ralph Ellison would have wanted whatever was published to be a single coherent whole. It was inevitable, perhaps, that whatever was published would be measured by the yardstick of *Invisible Man*. Some critics have indeed used *Invisible Man* as an instrument of pressure upon *Juneteenth*; and as the years melted into decades, the success of the first novel may have inhibited Ellison himself in the creation of his second novel. But I have never believed that the first could in any way diminish the second, or that *Juneteenth* could in any way diminish *Invisible Man*, anymore than the posthumously published *The Last Tycoon* diminished *The Great Gatsby*. In fact, *Juneteenth* is in some ways a fascinating sequel to *Invisible Man*. Some of Ellison' s themes, characters, and passages in the second novel will provoke a reconsideration of *Invisible Man* that will heighten the stature of that novel and its achievement.

IN ASSEMBLING *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, which appeared in 1995, and *Flying Home and Other Stories*, which appeared in 1996, I was an invisible editor. There were editorial decisions to be made, to be sure: which pieces to include, which to leave out. In a few cases, mercifully few, there were conflicts between the manuscript versions, and there was the recurring question of how much copy-editing to inflict upon a dead writer's prose. But the author had seen most of these various works through the press, and so very little was left to chance. The most formidable challenge was the matter of sequence. Yet even in this matter, perhaps because Ellison had so painstakingly shaped *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986), and because the short stories seemed almost to arrange themselves according to the characters' progression from boyhood and youth to manhood, neither collection betrayed more than an occasional fingerprint of its editor.

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But things were different with Ellison's second novel. For a start, the conventions for editing a single, full-length, unfinished work, especially a work forty years in the making, with so many fragments and false starts—the editorial conventions in such a case are complicated. An editor's choices will be open to dispute by virtue of the unfinished nature of the manuscript, and the time span of its composition, and the obvious importance of the work. "[L]ike some great unfinished surveyor's map," Gail Collins nicely observed in the *Boston Globe*, "filled with colors but no final coordinates," Ellison's second novel "sprawled out before him into a vast uncharted unknown."

The editing of such a work involved a measure of the "play-it-by-eye-and-play-it-by-ear" improvisational attitude that Ellison often invoked and celebrated. But it was Ellison, and not I, who was the first, the last, and the only improviser. Whatever judgments of taste and instinct I had to make—and, for better or worse, an editor's taste and instinct are often important in solving the problems of posthumous publication—I always labored to confine myself to the dictates of the manuscripts. I took my instructions from what was before my eyes.

A FEW YEARS after *Invisible Man*, Ellison responded to a query from the National Book Award Foundation with a reflection on his efforts. "My sole preoccupation was with transforming a seemingly intractable body of material into a work of art," he said. During the three years that I worked with the manuscripts and the notes of his second novel, I began to realize that my task was a distantly related one, the task of discerning—not creating, but discerning—a work of art within the "seemingly intractable body of material" that Ellison left behind from forty years of work. If there is an iron rule in such matters, it is that the state of the manuscript must be the prime determinant of an editor's decisions.

And Ellison had not left a manuscript, he had left manuscripts. There were more than two thousand holograph pages, typescript pages, computer disks, printouts, false starts and new starts, revisions and re-revisions, notes, clips, scraps of notes, and outlines. Some of these texts did not obviously belong either to Book I or Book II, which were the closest that Ellison came to completed manuscripts within the enormous work-in-progress. The job of the editor was to sort out the papers and the disks into a chronology of composition and a coherence of narrative. The methods of textual scholarship helped me to determine the state of the manuscripts; and my finding was that Book II was the more finished and the more coherent of the manuscripts. Moreover, Ellison himself chose numerous portions of Book II to see the light of day when he surrendered sections from the work-in-progress for publication. Thus it was that the manuscripts themselves determined my decision that Book II should be the manuscript of choice for purposes of publication.

I FOUND MANUSCRIPT drafts written from the 1950s to the 1990s, in which Ellison tried to tell and to embellish his essential story of Alonzo Hickman—the jazzman turned Daddy Hickman, as he is called by little Bliss, and then shortly afterward Reverend Hickman—and of Bliss, whom Hickman midwifes into this world and who then turns into the arch-racist Senator Sunraider. Nothing of perfect clarity emerged from the totality of manuscripts except the sense that to the end of his life Ellison continued to struggle over how to unify all of his story in a single novel. You might say that his motto as a novelist had been *e pluribus unum*; but as we all know, that is easier said than done.

Ellison did not seem any closer to realizing his ambition in the later print-outs than in the earlier typescripts. Indeed, he may have wandered farther from his original purpose as he added new scenes and riffs, few of which advanced the central action of the work as a whole. As if to goad himself back on track, Ellison wrote notes reminding himself that every passage of a novel should advance the action. His notes are rich and copious, but certain obvious and salient details are missing. I will give only one example. I had hoped to find some reference to the precise identity of those sections of the novel that constituted the "year's worth of revisions" that were lost in the Plainfield fire in 1967. I found no such indication. But I was able to conclude from the internal evidence of early and later typescripts that what was lost in that disaster, and then reconstructed and rewritten slowly in succeeding years, was most likely a version of Book II. Interestingly, the excerpt that Ellison published after the fire was "Night-Talk," which appeared in the *Quarterly Review of Literature* in 1969, an episode that picks up from the draft of Book II, from which he had edited most of "And Hickman Arrives" for Saul Bellow's journal *The Noble Savage* back in 1960.

Ellison spoke in 1970 of possibly publishing the novel in several volumes, and recent commentators have spoken confidently of three books; but I found only Books I and II labeled as such. Book I was narrated by a reporter named McIntyre, and Book II told the story of Hickman and Bliss from Bliss's birth to his death as Senator Sunraider, and essentially told it through the minds of Hickman and Bliss/Sunraider. Additional material—notably a long Oklahoma section from which an earlier version of "Song of Innocence," which appeared in the *Iowa Review* in 1970, was taken—is nowhere referred to as Book III.

It was impossible not to conclude that Ellison—who boldly aimed at an epic novel charting the immense, and uneasily settled, moral and racial territory of America—did not manage to thread his way out of his self-designed narrative labyrinth. The very magnitude of the two thousand or so pages was both tantalizing and misleading. There was too much material and too little material. As early as 1960, however, when he published "And Hickman Arrives," Ellison had settled on the heart of his story: it was Hickman and his relationship with the little boy who looks white, talks and is raised black, runs off passing for white, winds up as the race-baiting Senator Sunraider, and dies from wounds suffered at the hands of an assassin who is his unacknowledged son.

IN 1959, ELLISON wrote Murray of writing, revising, and editing fiercely in order to give Bellow fifty pages of the novel-in-progress. Unlike the seven excerpts that Ellison published over the ensuing years, "And Hickman Arrives" is not a consecutive excerpt from the work. Ellison began this excerpt with the third person prologue to Book I, and ignored entirely the remaining 335 pages of Book I, and followed the prologue with a scene not found in either Book I or Book II, his two manuscripts at the time, in which Reverend Hickman and his deacons and deaconesses witness the shooting from the Senate gallery, where they have gone for a glimpse of the Senator after they are turned away from his office and their warnings fall on deaf ears elsewhere in Washington. Ellison then cuts to the scene in which Hickman shows six-year-old Bliss his child-size coffin and instructs him in his part in the Hickman-crafted drama of death and resurrection that partakes of sacred and profane realities, not the least of which is Hickman's revivalist variation on the old American confidence game.

Here some reviewers of *Juneteenth*, irritated by what they mistakenly interpret as Hickman's unadulterated nobility, miss much of the complexity that Ellison put into his character. Hickman is by no means perfect. Even after he leaves his life as a horn-blowing fool, a gambling man, and a hard-drinking cocksman to raise little Bliss, and to love him, he also intimidates the little boy into playing dead and

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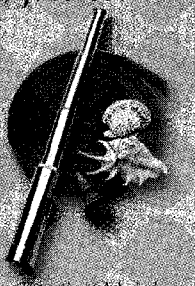

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then rising from his coffin at Hickman's biblical signal in order to bring home the drama of Christ's death and resurrection to the congregation.

This, surely, was a disturbing thing to do. Like the invisibility of *Invisible Man*, Hickman's perfection is in the eye of the beholder—in this case, of those (such as James Wood in these pages) looking so hard for allegory that they fail to see Hickman's occasional earthly excess of pride in his mission. With deftly placed ironies, however, Ellison makes clear that he is himself under no illusions about his character. Hickman' s noble pursuit of spiritual and secular goals of redemption and deliverance is grounded partly on manipulations worthy of a trickster.

Ellison ended "And Hickman Arrives" after Hickman and Bliss are separated in the chaos and the confusion of the boy's attempted kidnapping on Juneteenth night by a psychotic white woman who claims to be his mother. Thus it seems clear that back in 1960 Ellison took pains to craft a long piece, composed of half-a-dozen scenes linked together to maximize the story' s dramatic tension and to show off the relationship and the background of the central characters, and the motive of the longer work. It is also true, as will be seen in the manuscripts to be included in the scholarly edition of the novel-in-progress, that Ellison aimed at integrating McIntyre's perspective and voice and an abundance of Oklahoma material and episodes, told alternatively to McIntyre, and later to Hickman, into the central story of Hickman and Bliss/Sunraider. It is also true, and it is regrettable, that Ellison never found a satisfactory way to accomplish this integration of sub-plots into a single composition. And yet there lay in wait, close to completion—not complete, but within striking distance of completion—the story of Hickman and Bliss, the latter grown to manhood and come to preach in that national church of idealism and cynicism, the United States Senate.

WAS THIS ENOUGH for Ellison? Clearly not. He did more than tinker in his last years. He rewrote and sometimes recast and expanded scenes that he had finished and published decades earlier. He lived (and perhaps he died) with his great dream of writing a novel on the scale of *Moby-Dick* slipping farther and farther from his grasp; but he never gave up, and he had no intention of quitting the fight. Only death defeated him. When he died, leaving behind a sorrow of incompleteness that perhaps only his widow could truly comprehend, what was to be done? Working with the manuscripts, I was reminded of *Invisible Man*'s conceit of listening to Louis Armstrong through the speakers of five phonographs simultaneously. I came to know what Albert Murray meant when he said that "Ralph didn't have a writer's block; he had the opposite."

Ellison followed the riffer's muse no matter where she seemed to lead. His notes are full of anxieties (and ideas) about how to integrate the McIntyre and Oklahoma narratives and sub-plots into the central action of Hickman and Bliss, and how to bring his whole story home. Yet the manuscripts, all the revisitings of the late '80s and early '90s, shy away from that integrative task even as Ellison set out to embrace it. That was the central perplexity. As I pondered the choices available to an editor of this unscaled mountain of writing, I recalled these words in Ellison's first novel: "Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled 'file and forget.' "

Was I to deposit the manuscripts and notes in the Library of Congress to rest unpublished with Ellison's papers? Or was I to publish all of it? (A nearly impossible task, by the way, because Ellison sometimes created file after file of the same episode on his word processor, often changing less than a dozen words or phrases in each version and usually giving the versions different titles.) Or was I to publish each and every section in its latest version, along with lists of changes that Ellison made to the successive versions, and include also a generous sampling of his notes and comments on the overall work and its individual sections, episodes, characters, and themes?

THIS LATTER OPTION always seemed to me a fitting and proper way to make public posthumously what had been private while the writer was alive and cherished hopes of bringing his magnum opus to completion and putting it into the hands of his many readers. But such a volume would be a barely manageable hybrid; part novel, part compilation, it would be a kind of archive between hard covers. And would such a compendious Book of Ellison's Second Novel have been enough? Would it have done justice to what he actually achieved in fiction in the decades after *Invisible Man*? No, all these archival options properly belong to a variorum edition for scholars and libraries, not for the reading public. (The scholars and the libraries will anyway have their tome eventually.)

Some critics have argued that since Ellison did not publish a single coherent narrative from his multi-layered second novel during his lifetime, he would not have wanted to see a volume such as *Juneteenth* published after his death. How do they know? What we do know is that Ellison was busy on transitions and connections for a single novel. And we know also that he never abandoned hope of finishing. "There will be something very soon," he said in 1994: something, but not everything. Or did he mean everything? The truth is that we will never know what he had in mind.

STILL, SOME COLLABORATION between Ellison and me, his notes and manuscripts standing in for his living voice perhaps, was possible. I had no choice but "to slip into the breaks and look around." What I found, after working through a jumble of manuscripts in varying states of composition, was that the heart of the novel, in the words of one reviewer, "[e]ven in its incomplete, editor-assembled form," was "an extraordinary book." My view, it turns out, is not universally shared. A number of critics have posted Caveat Lector signs to warn readers away from *Juneteenth*. Louis Menand called the book a "Frankenstein's monster." He worried in *The New York Times Book Review* that "what at first seemed hideously contrived" will come, over the years, "to seem perfectly natural, even a little adorable. *Juneteenth* will go into the world and become Ralph Ellison's second novel."

If Menand fears that readers will come to regard the editor's decisions as the writer's decisions, this is an understandable and legitimate concern; but as I made clear in my edition of *Juneteenth*, this was a concern that I, too, shared. Precisely to avoid confusion between Ellison and Callahan, I wrote an introduction and an afterword pointing out that *Juneteenth* was the central narrative—not the only narrative, the central narrative, the most finished narrative—that I discovered in the manuscripts of Ellison's saga. I reiterated that every word was Ellison's, and that nothing was my invention; and I explained which of his manuscripts make up *Juneteenth* and why. It was altogether appropriate and necessary to frame the posthumous book with explanatory essays. Guardians of our national literature may rest assured that now, and for years to come, these essays will inform the reader honestly about the provenance, and the limitations, and the torso-like nature, of *Juneteenth*.

Commentators may surely differ about whether it was best to publish *Juneteenth* in advance of a comprehensive compilation of Ellison's manuscripts, or even to publish it at all; but it is the readers of the book who will decide whether it is a "Frankenstein' s monster" or a work of art. "Once introduced into society," Ellison had written in 1946 when *Invisible Man* was little more than a glint in his eye,

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"the work of art begins to pulsate with those meanings, emotions, ideas brought to it by its audience and over which the artist has but limited control." So it is best for now, and most fitting for the Ellisonian spirit, to give the last word on the controversial *Juneteenth* to a reader, to the reader who closed a letter to this journal with these words: "It's like nothing we've had before—a rocky, sometimes shaky island of visionary meditations, fables, dialogues, and dreams reclaimed from a great American writer's sea of manuscript. And it's no mistake." This reader was right. Whatever else it is, *Juneteenth* is no mistake. ■

A Yes or a No

By MICHAEL ANDRÉ BERNSTEIN

Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist by Myriam Anissimov translated by Steve Cox

(Overlook Press, 452 pp., $37.95)

I.

TONALLY, EVERYTHING WAS there from the beginning. Although it took more than two decades after its publication in 1947 for his first book, *Se Questo è un uomo*, or *If This Is a Man*, to be widely recognized as one of the indispensable texts of our epoch, Primo Levi seems to have emerged from his eleven months in Auschwitz not just as a survivor, obsessed by the need to bear witness to what he had seen and endured, but as a writer, whose immediately recognizable voice, narrative inventiveness, and lucid severity give his work a singular authority. His was the true Dantean voice of the infernal world built by the Third Reich, and his refusal, even in that hell, to abdicate any of his innate curiosity, intelligence, or capacity for moral judgment, makes him one of the few exemplary figures in postwar European literature. His writing embodies perhaps the last great testament of the Enlightenment's trust in the adequacy of reason to comprehend the world and to shape a fitting place for us in it.

Auschwitz forced Levi to test those rational, humane certitudes against an annihilatory assault for which they had never been intended—an assault that aimed expressly at eradicating every trace of such assumptions in victim and perpetrator alike; and his best work is an endlessly revised meditation on both the fragility and the tenacity of the values he had brought with him into the camps. And yet Levi's canonization as the emblematic moral voice of the Holocaust survivor has usually come at the price of ignoring the sheer writerly virtuosity of his books, as well as the often breathtaking idiosyncracy of his narrative decisions and point of view.

Se Questo è un uomo (so misleadingly renamed, for marketing reasons, as *Survival in Auschwitz*) opens with what must surely be among the most unexpected sentences in any account of the death camps: "It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944." Levi goes on to explain that by February 1944, when he arrived in Auschwitz, "the German Government had decided, owing to the growing scarcity of labor, to lengthen the average life-span of the prisoners destined for elimination"; but the almost throw-away irony of the phrase "my good fortune", "*per mia fortuna*", resonates well beyond its immediate context, and signals the complex perspective from which the story will be told.

"My good fortune": the lines indicate an awareness of crucial facts of which the prisoner was completely ignorant in February 1944, and which he could have learned only after his liberation. The opening thus sets up the double focus that will dominate the whole book and generate its basic structure—the constant shift between the point of view of the baffled prisoner, forced step-by-step to try to learn some indispensable survival tactics in a setting whose irrationality deliberately thwarts any kind of systematic and prudential acquisition of knowledge about its operation, and that of the author who somehow lived through the ordeal and is now, in the very act of writing, trying to comprehend and communicate his experiences, supplementing his limited information with whatever sources he can find.

Like a classical invocation, Levi's inaugural naming of his *fortuna* acknowledges the external power that helped him survive while also crystallizing one of the central motifs of his story. Repeatedly, Levi stresses how many separate and unforeseeable events had to combine for him to stay alive in Auschwitz. These strictly "accidental" occurrences range from his encounter with Lorenzo Perrone, an Italian civilian worker who for six months, at the risk of his own life, brought the starving captive enough food to keep him alive, to the scarlet fever that a short time earlier would have immediately doomed Levi to the gas chambers as unfit for further labor, but instead confined him to the infirmary when the Nazis abandoned the camp and took all the able-bodied prisoners with them on a forced march back to Germany, during which virtually every one of them was murdered.

Levi makes clear how much pure luck, as well as a gift for improvisation and a certain inner resilience of spirit and physical health, was necessary to have any chance of survival at all, though he also emphasizes that for millions of victims, none of these qualities was sufficient to save them from extermination: "If the drowned have no story, and single and broad is the path to perdition, the paths to salvation are many, difficult and improbable." The motif of his "good luck" recurs throughout *Survival in Auschwitz*, so much so that it becomes a touchstone not just of Levi's situation as a prisoner, but also of the voice and the temperament he has carefully constructed to narrate his story.

LEVI'S RESISTANCE TO the lethal extremism of Nazi ideology takes the form of refusing to pitch his own rhetoric at the level of the extreme. He rarely mentions his own physical suffering, and, wherever possible, he focuses the reader's attention on what he would later describe as "marginal moments of reprieve": episodes in which a prosaic emphasis on the smallest and least horrific details are part of a conscious determination to narrate his Auschwitz experiences in a language that was not utterly severed from his readers or from his own pre-war and post-war existence.

Thus, while Levi never lets us forget that the Nazi policy was to work to death those prisoners not immediately condemned to the gas chamber upon their

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arrival, he also includes in *Survival in Auschwitz* the story of how Resnyk, one of the stronger men in Levi's work group, against all camp practices accepted the much weaker Levi as his partner in the back-breaking task of carrying heavy loads through the snow and the mud, and also tried his best to support the greater part of the weight himself. Another chapter is even called, only in part ironically, "*Una buona giornata*," or "A Good Day," because "today the sun rose bright and clear for the first time from the horizon of mud," and because an extra ration of camp soup meant that for once the ravenous, desperate hunger of Auschwitz was temporarily stilled. Toward the end of the book, Levi explicitly draws all these separate incidents together into a single reflection constructed largely on the theme of *fortuna*:

> It is lucky that [*è fortuna che*] it is not windy today. Strange, how in some way one always has the impression of being fortunate [*fortunati*], how some chance happening, perhaps infinitesimal, stops us crossing the threshold of despair and allows us to live. It is raining, but it is not windy.

HERE, AS SO often in the book, a single sentence shifts so smoothly from the impersonal ("one has the impression") to the first-person plural ("stops us ... allows us") that it is easy to forget that we are reading only a single prisoner's subjective account. By its very syntax, however, Levi's individual response is endowed with a communal point of origin, as though it were transparently articulating the attitude of all his fellow prisoners. Grammatically, large parts of *Survival in Auschwitz* are written almost like an ethnographer's recording of the tale of a tribe of which he himself is a member. Without ever claiming any special gifts or illuminations for the narrator, Levi's language speaks not just in the first-person singular that is characteristic of "testimonial" writing, but also in the first-person plural voice of the prisoners as a distinctive group about whose shared experiences it is possible to generalize. Even when Levi begins a section by describing some purely personal thought or encounter, he quickly shifts to the first-person plural, to the communal point of regard, so as to include his fellow captives in the narrative.

It is rarely just Primo Levi, the survivor-narrator, who is shown struggling to absorb the brutal lessons of camp life. Even as it registers the successful effect of the Nazis' deliberate strategy of turning the prisoners against one another in a vicious and ultimately futile competition for a few extra crumbs of food or moments of respite, Levi's prose resists that atomization. It makes the very acquisition of knowledge about how to survive seem a collective experience:

> We still have a great number of things to learn, but we have learnt many already.... We have learnt that everything is useful: the wire to tie up our shoes, the rags to wrap around our feet, waste paper to (illegally) pad our jacket against the cold. We have learnt, on the other hand, that everything can be stolen, in fact is automatically stolen as soon as attention is relaxed; and to avoid this, we had to learn the art of sleeping with our head on a bundle made up of our jacket and containing all our belongings, from the bowl to the shoes.

Phrases such as, "we, too, know," "we already know," and "we had soon learned" introduce most of Levi's detailed descriptions of camp existence, with the result that the intimately personal voice of *Survival in Auschwitz* is dense with the experiences of all those who were there with him. The creation of a syntax sufficiently flexible to accommodate sentence-by-sentence shifts, and even phrase-by-phrase shifts, in the grammatical and psychological subject of the action—from "I" to "we" and then to "one"—may be Levi's least recognized triumph, but it is the bedrock upon which his moral and intellectual clarity depend.

Thus it is not only we, the readers of Levi's book, who have come to regard him as the representative voice of the Auschwitz survivor. His own language already achieves such a role. Levi's syntax ensures that the book's moral judgments seem to issue from the collective voice and experience of the prisoners, thereby preserving his own modesty while at the same time endowing his conclusions with the force of all the victims in whose name they are uttered. Yet it is also a "we" that, almost uniquely in Holocaust writing, seeks ways to engage with and find links to the reader, rather than maintaining an unbridgeable gap between the survivor and the rest of humanity.

IT WAS A central aim of Nazism to sunder forever any link between Jews and humankind as a whole. Levi believed that if readers could not recognize and imaginatively grasp any elements in the descriptions of camp survivors' experiences, then the Nazis had succeeded in excising the core of their victims' humanity. The care that Levi always took to make himself understood to his readers, his fastidious attention to clarity, his insistence upon the communicative and communal function of language even regarding the infernal world of a death camp, is proof, at the level of the word and the sentence, that the Nazis failed to dehumanize him.

Like other survivors, Levi insists that hunger, exhaustion, and thirst had an utterly different meaning in the camps than in the outside world:

> Our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man ... it is not possible to sink lower than this.... Nothing belongs to us anymore; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name.

But at the very moment that he stresses the radical incommensurability of what was perpetrated in Auschwitz, he searches for analogies that come from the common world that he and his readers know equally well, and to which everyone, camp survivor and ordinary human being alike, has an equal imaginative access:

> Consider what value, what meaning is enclosed even in the smallest of our daily habits, in the hundred possessions which even the poorest beggar owns: a handkerchief, an old letter, the photo of a cherished person. These things are part of us, almost like limbs of our body; nor is it conceivable that we can be deprived of them in our world, for we would immediately find others to substitute for the old ones, other objects which are ours in their personification and evocation of our memories. Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself.

IN THESE SENTENCES, the "we" that had hitherto been the collective voice of the prisoners has seamlessly expanded to include the book's readers as well; and in this opening toward a prosaic normalcy, with its concomitant refusal to isolate the survivor's experience from the rest of humankind—and hence to promote it as uniquely instructive—Levi is at his most subtly polemical, all without ever rupturing the evenhanded fluency of the prose.

Jean Améry, whose account of his experiences in Auschwitz, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, is deeply at odds with Levi's account, crystallized his

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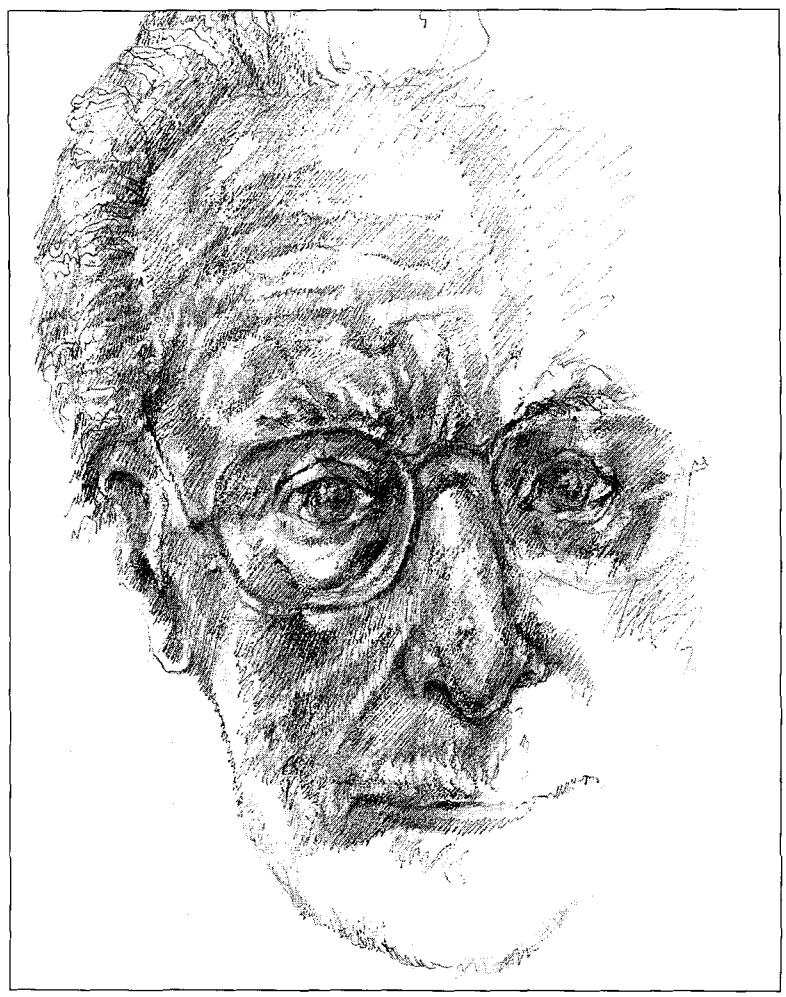
very different perspective in a memorable epigram: "No bridge led from death in Auschwitz to *Death in Venice*." But to Levi, maintaining some bridge, no matter how fragile, between Auschwitz and the world from which he had been brutally severed, was indispensable—not just as a post-war writer for whom connecting with his readers was a personal moral imperative, but even more so as a prisoner trying to preserve his identity in the camp. In response to Améry, Levi proposes a counter-epigram: "The aims of life are the best defense against death; and not only in the Lager."

With his prosaic comparisons to daily life, and with his numerous allusions to the realm of non-Jewish European high culture (for which he has been routinely chastised by the zealots of identity politics), Levi refused to regard Auschwitz as a uniquely authoritative testing-place of human beings, let alone of modern society, human nature, or the character of Western culture as a whole. He rejected what would become perhaps the most potent of the ways in which the Shoah has been absorbed into intellectual and cultural discourse. Since so much of our culture is still captivated by the revelatory power of the extraordinary, and since we believe that there is an essential truth about ourselves, our society, and our values that becomes manifest only in these extreme moments which "ordinary life" covers over, and since we have been encouraged to imagine that it is only at the "cutting edge" of the unthinkable that the most valuable insights lie hidden, the Shoah is now being taken as offering the most authentic image of the underlying reality of our world. But *Survival in Auschwitz* contests every one of those assumptions almost as strongly as it contests the Nazis' division of humans into inferior and superior races, with the paradoxical consequence that, all the literary prizes and public praise notwithstanding, Primo Levi's own standpoint, his determinedly prosaic perspective, has remained fundamentally unheeded.



Primo Levi by David Schorr for The New Republic

II.

Its tonal mastery notwithstanding, there was an extraordinary price to pay for the lucidity and the sanity of *Survival in Auschwitz*, and much of Levi's subsequent career can be understood in part as a reflection on his precarious and problematic first accomplishment. The *fortuna* under whose aegis he placed his survival is shockingly unconnected to any larger orders of providence or degrees of personal merit; and as he grew older, Levi became increasingly haunted by the randomness of his "good luck." The historian Martin Gilbert has described such reactions as the "tainted luck of survival"; and in his darker moments, Levi judged the fact that his survival was "unearned" as signifying that it was also fundamentally "undeserved."

From such a perspective, though, the strategy of making the narrator of *Survival in Auschwitz* representative of the prisoners as a collective body was bound to strike Levi as morally unjustifiable:

> We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck [*fortuna*] did not touch bottom. Those who did so ... have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are ... the complete witnesses, the ones whose depositions would have a general significance.

Since the whole justification for the first-person plural voice that he created to narrate *Survival in Auschwitz* was its "general significance," for Levi to doubt its legitimacy was, in effect, to undermine the book's enabling assumption.

In his last and most anguished text, *The Drowned and the Saved*, which appeared in 1986, Levi depicts himself as tormented by a sense of shame at having survived when so many millions died. He wrestles with the unbearable conviction that it was the noblest among the prisoners who were murdered because they refused the compromises necessary to live: "the 'saved' ... were not the best, those predestined to do good, the bearers of a message: what I had seen and lived through proved the exact contrary ... the worst survived—that is, the fittest; the best all died."

As bleak and self-accusing as these words are, it is worth noting how closely they echo the judgment of many Zionist leaders in the first years after the liberation of the death camps. David Ben-Gurion wrote in 1949 that "among the survivors of the German concentration camps were those who, had they not been what they were—harsh, evil, and egotistical people—would not have survived, and all they endured rooted out every good part of their souls." And David Shaltiel, later an Israeli Army general and ambassador, traveled to Palestine with several survivors and reported that "I believe that those who remained alive lived because they were egotists and looked out for themselves first."

For such sentiments, there is no adequate alibi. They cannot be rationalized away by invoking their historical or ideological context. Psychologically, no doubt, these charges serve as a flight from the

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unbearable arbitrariness of survival, by moralizing the situation and positing a greater element of free choice than is warranted. Instead of *fortuna*, and incomprehensible cruelty, they insist on finding a morally comprehensible struggle. But it is precisely such men as Ben-Gurion and Shaltiel, national leaders who were directly charged with the care and the rehabilitation of the survivors, who should have done the most to resist such a heartless and tawdry rationalization. At bottom, there is no significant difference between this harsh secular judgement and the offensive certainty of those ultra-Orthodox Jews who believed that the Jews murdered in the camps had been punished because European Jewry had fallen away from God's laws.

IT IS EVEN sadder to see Levi, who made the moral indifference of *fortuna* central to *Survival in Auschwitz*, begin to blame himself for the good outcome of his bad luck, and to assign agency and choice where, as no one knew better than he himself, there was none. Still, it was Levi's ability to keep his darker moods largely out of *Survival in Auschwitz* that was so astonishing. Indeed, no aspect of that work has been more often remarked on by its readers, including Levi himself. In 1976, in an appendix to an annotated edition of *Survival in Auschwitz* intended for use in Italian schools and not yet included in the English translations of the book, Levi describes his literary strategy as follows:

> ... in writing this book, I deliberately took on the calm and sober language of a witness, not the plaintive tone of a victim nor the outrage of an avenger: I thought that my words would be most believable and useful the more they appeared to be objective and the less they sounded fervent. Only in this way does a witness fulfill his function, which is to prepare the ground for the judges. The judges are all of you.

So much of the narrator's persona in *Survivor in Auschwitz*, is, like the tone of the book, a purposeful literary construct, intended to achieve a specific effect. Nothing better illustrates the deliberate tonal control in Levi's account than a comparison of *Survival in Auschwitz* with the report on the medical and sanitary conditions in Monowitz camp that he and a fellow survivor from Turin, Dr. Leonardo De Benedetti, initially drafted at the request of the Russian liberators and then expanded into a brief monograph which they published in 1946 in the medical journal *Minerva Medica*. The monograph constitutes Levi's first published text about Auschwitz, and it has finally been reprinted in Marco Belpoliti's splendid new two-volume edition of Levi's collected works. (The report is much blunter and more brutal in its account of Auschwitz than anything in Levi's book, although the two texts were written at almost the same time. Here, for example, is a typical passage from the report:

> In the month of August 1944 the men assigned to the chemistry Kommando were involved in reorganizing a small store containing sacs of a substance with a phenol base. Right from the start, particles of this product mixed with sweat and stuck to the workers' faces and hands. Exposure to the sun at first induced a deep pigmentation of the areas exposed, accompanied by an intense burning. It caused a widespread peeling of the skin. Although the skin thus exposed to the infecting agent became particularly sensitive and painful, the work went on for twenty days with no protective measures taken. And although fifty men were affected by this painful dermatitis, not one of them was sent to the hospital.

The specific incidents described in the monograph are uniformly sordid and grim, and the narrative is utterly bereft of "moments of reprieve" or unexpected interventions of a life-saving *fortuna*.

EVEN IN *Survival in Auschwitz*, though, Levi's strategic avoidance of either "the plaintive tone of a victim [or] the outrage of an avenger" could never be entirely successful. And yet those emotions, when they do surface, take a form at once so oblique to, and yet so disruptive of, the rest of the text that most readings—including Levi's own—have simply omitted it from their interpretations. Before the initial mention of Levi's "good fortune" with which the "Author's Preface" opens, the book itself begins with a brief poem that I want to quote in full, so as to make clear its radical disjuncture from the work that it introduces. (Inexplicably, the English translation prints the poem after the preface.)

> You who live safe
> In your warm houses,
> You who find, returning in the evening,
> Hot food and friendly faces;
> Consider if this is a man
> Who works in the mud
> Who does not know peace
> Who fights for a scrap of bread
> Who dies because of a yes or a no.
> Consider if this is a woman,
> Without hair and without name
> With no more strength to remember,
> Her eyes empty and her womb cold
> Like a frog in winter.
> Meditate that this came about:
> I commend these words to you.
> Carve them in your hearts
> At home, in the street,
> Going to bed, rising;
> Repeat them to your children,
> Or may your houses fall apart,
> May illness impede you,
> May your children turn their faces from you.

THE POEM IS dated January 10, 1946. When he printed it independently, Levi gave it the title "*Shema*" after the name and the opening word ("Hear!") of the central prayer of the Jewish liturgy, a confession of faith that must be recited every morning and evening and at the moment of impending death. Although the Hebrew prayer consists of three passages from the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:12-21; Numbers 15:37-41), Levi only paraphrases those verses from Deuteronomy 6 that announce the people's obligation to meditate on God's commandments and to transmit them to future generations. To these, he adds a condensed appropriation of the lengthy catalogue of curses in Deuteronomy 28 that specifies the punishments for any faltering in obedience:

> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees ... then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. You shall become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

The most startling aspect of Levi's "*Shema*" is how completely it severs the readers who are commanded to meditate on the atrocities committed at Auschwitz from the victims who suffered those horrors. In the poem, there is none of the bridge-building between survivor and

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reader that marks the rest of the book. Even more unsettling, the poem's palpable anger is scarcely directed against the Nazi perpetrators at all. It is aimed at the readers who never experienced the camps and who, therefore, might fall away from their obligation to keep Auschwitz in the forefront of their consciousness. Elsewhere Levi categorically rejects the extracting of an ultimate lesson from the death camps, but here he formulates such a lesson in the rhythms and the tones—in an appropriation that verges on blasphemy—of the Jewish people's fundamental faith. All the bitterness that was kept out of the prose sections is already fully crystallized in the verses that stand at the gateway of the book, like an admonitory reminder of what would henceforth stay unspoken.

"*Shema*" expresses a position that is very close to a criticism of the moral thrust and the narrative technique of the book that it precedes. And yet the poem is clearly foundational for the book, since it provides both the title and the central question of the whole work. Initially, Levi wanted to call the book after its central chapter, "*I sommersi e i salvati*" ("The Drowned and the Saved"), but he was persuaded by his editor, Franco Antonicelli, to use instead the crucial fifth line of the introductory poem: "*Considerate se questo è un uomo*" ("Consider if this is a man"). Almost exactly forty years later, Levi would return to his image of "the drowned and the saved" for the title of his final book. For the earlier text, though, Antonicelli's suggestion was an inspired one, since the work is structured less as a sequential memoir than as a series of testings—of "essays," in Montaigne's sense—of what constitutes a person's humanity and what are the minimum conditions required to sustain it.

Unlike the rest of the book, though, the poem only pretends to ask its readers to participate in the question posed by its title. Grammatically, the question is addressed to the poem's readers, but emotionally and rhetorically the text denies them the right to do anything except "meditate that this came about." The reader's task is purely to contemplate the suffering of those who "labored in the mud" and "died at a yes or a no." For the poem's readers actually to take up the question "if this is a man" is an impertinence; but for the readers of the narrative it is a genuine, if deeply painful puzzle which they are asked, like the survivors, to "consider."

There is an absolute disjunction between how the poem's syntax and grammar reaches out to its readers, and the hostility with which its moral and emotional tone views them. But this disjunction is eliminated entirely in the prose chapters of *Survival in Auschwitz*, whose limpidity is founded on a seamless accord among its narrative voice, syntax, and moral tone. The difference between the prefatory poem and the ensuing text is the clearest evidence we have of how scrupulously Levi shaped his narrative, and of how much effort it took to create the measured, skeptical, and tolerant voice that we regard as "naturally" his.

III.

Primo Levi often said that he modeled his literary style on "the weekly report commonly used in factories," where linguistic transparency and analytic objectivity are paramount. Already in high school, he had been strongly drawn to science as an antidote to the empty grandiloquence that dominated the teaching of the humanities in Mussolini's Italy, and many of his science teachers were strongly anti-fascist. One of these, Nicola Dallaporta, accepted Levi as a graduate student even after the passage of the anti-Semitic decrees in 1938, and in 1941 Levi received his doctorate in chemistry *summa cum laude*, with a special note added to indicate that the recipient was "of the Jewish Race." In Auschwitz, Levi's technical knowledge made him a potentially valuable "specialist" to the Nazis, who transferred him from an outdoor work squad to the factory where they were trying—in vain, as it turned out—to produce artificial rubber for the war.

That assignment helped to save Levi's life, and he never forgot that he owed his survival in the death camp, as well as his successful professional career after the war as an expert on synthetic wire enamels for the Turin-based SIVA paint company, to his training in chemistry. Yet he also insisted that the skills that he had acquired in his scientific work were foundational for his literary work: "I write because I am a chemist: my old trade has been largely transfused into my new one." He defined the chemist's task as "the art of separating, weighing, and distinguishing," and he regarded these procedures as equally valuable "for the person who sets out to describe events or give body to his own imagination."

Still, Levi's self-description as primarily a scientist compelled by external circumstances to take up writing has been a little too uncritically accepted. For it blinds one to the sly mockery of the postwar Italian literary establishment implicit in Levi's emphasis on the utility of his scientific training. There is a striking parallel between Levi's praise of science as a kind of mental *ascesis* and Robert

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Musil's injunction that "anyone who is incapable of solving an integral equation, anyone who is unable to perform a laboratory experiment, should today be forbidden to discuss all spiritual matters." Not all the empty phrase-mongering and pomposity were due to fascism alone, nor was all of it purged when Il Duce fell.

THE DEMAND FOR ideologically "committed" writing suited Levi little better when it came from the left than when it had come from the right, and his resistance to the politically tendentious or facilely experimental movements championed by powerful critics and publishers made him completely marginal to the Italian literary world of the 1950s and '60s. His work as a chemist earned him widespread recognition among his peers long before his writing attained a similar stature. Indeed, between 1947 and 1958, when a new and augmented edition of *Survival in Auschwitz* finally appeared, Levi was entirely ignored as a writer, and for years afterwards, even when his books began to attract international praise, it was rare for Italian critics to treat him as anything more than a kind of gifted amateur.

Yet Levi's self-description encourages one to overlook how masterful a craftsman he is, and how rooted his most powerful effects are in a complete command of literary resources and techniques. Levi did not stumble into being a writer because he had been in Auschwitz. At the age of 28, with *Se Questo è un uomo*, he entered Italian literature like a man taking possession of his own home. Except in the monograph composed in 1946 with De Benedetti, Levi never wrote about Auschwitz strictly as a scientist. Instead he combined the analytic judiciousness of his ideal scientist with a steadiness of moral observation and judgment that he explicitly associates with a particular constellation of classical authors. He invokes Dante and Manzoni often and centrally throughout his writings. This was not only because they embody the values that he drew on to preserve his humanity in the camp. For all his modesty, both genuine and strategical, Levi was in the process of creating a body of work that established him truly as their modern heir.

The remarkable thing is that no aspect of Levi's work has been less carefully studied than the specifically writerly qualities that enable the articulation of his vision and his voice. Formal analyses of Levi's writings are far outnumbered by thematic and biographical treatments. A part of the reluctance to think formally about Levi's writing arises, I suspect, because in the face of so urgent and grievous a subject as the Shoah there is a general freezing up of literary and intellectual discriminations, as though in such a context the very act of evaluation and analysis were somehow indecent. But Levi himself argued fiercely that these representations of extreme evil require more, not less, clarity, and demand an affirmation, not an abdication, of the ability to uncover fundamental distinctions.

SINCE LEVI'S WRITINGS draw so heavily on the events of his life and explore their implications with such acuity, he presents a formidable challenge to any literarily naïve biographer. The temptation simply to paraphrase his works, and then to supplement the resulting synopses with a more-or-less thoughtfully assembled patchwork of pertinent historical and social information designed to serve as "context," can be especially hard to resist for a biographer who is reluctant to probe the differences between the man and the literary voice that he created to tell his story. Myriam Anissimov's biography, translated and lightly corrected from the original French version that appeared in 1996, is the first full-scale biography available; and it has been justly criticized for its lackluster qualities.

The criticisms have focused mostly on Anissimov's weakness as a historian, on her occasional errors of fact, and on the thinness of her discussion of fascism and postwar Italy, rather than on the blandness of her readings of Levi's texts. Yet the information that Anissimov has assembled, if not always what she does with it, is considerably more useful than some of her harshest critics would grant. Particularly valuable, I think, are the sometimes unexpected responses that her interviews elicited from several other Auschwitz survivors on whom Levi based some of the main characters in his books. One of these, Paul Steinberg, the "Henri" of *Survival in Auschwitz*, reacts to Levi's critical description of him with one of the most convincing criticisms of Levi's unyielding rectitude that I have encountered:

> No doubt he saw straight. I probably was that creature obsessed with survival.... To a neutral observer of my image as he saw it, I was certainly like that, fiercely determined to do all I could to live, prepared to use what means I had available, including the gift of rousing other people's sympathy.... I will never know whether I am entitled to ask for clemency from the jury. Is it so wrong to survive?

"Is it so wrong to survive?" When thinking about Levi's own last months, it is hard not to wish that he could have heard Steinberg's question as addressed to him. Anissimov quotes responses such as Steinberg's, but she never analyzes their implications, and finally the biography's limitations arise less from its inadequacy as social or political history than from a kind of respectful dutifulness that assumes—as Levi himself never assumed—that his story can more or less tell itself. Neither the formal inventiveness of Levi's writing, nor its relationship to the literary and philosophical traditions that it invokes and challenges, seems to engage Anissimov's curiosity, and her reluctance to ask any but the most ready-to-hand questions of either the man's life or work ends up glossing over much of the complexity and the strangeness of both.

OUTSIDE OF HIS own books and the numerous interviews that he gave during the last twenty-five years of his life, perhaps the most suggestive account of Levi's career is the detailed year-by-year chronology that appears in the first volume of Belpoliti's Einaudi edition. Much of the information gathered there confirms how different Levi's life was, not only from the great majority of death-camp survivors but also from most of the century's principal literary figures. Consider, for example, the very first sentence of the chronology: "1919: Primo Levi was born in Torino on July 31 in the house where he would reside the rest of his life." In its own way, this is nearly as unexpected an introduction to a twentieth-century European Jewish writer as Levi's invocation of his *fortuna* at the opening of *Survival in Auschwitz*.

Along with his wife Lucia and their children—both of them named in tribute to Lorenzo Perrone: Lisa Lorenza, born 1948, and Renzo, born in 1957—Levi set up household in the same apartment in which he had been born, and they shared it with his endlessly demanding invalid mother, who would outlive him. Lucia's mother, who was four years older than Levi's, lived only a few streets away, and when Renzo moved out of his parents' home, it was into another flat in the same building. Levi was the only member of his immediate circle to be deported by the Nazis; and when he finally made his way back to Turin after the Odyssean wanderings through much of eastern Europe and Byelorussia that he chronicled so vividly in *The Reawakening* (1963), he found his home intact, and the family and social structure in which he had grown up remarkably unchanged.

The Levis benefitted, of course, from the relatively higher rate of survival of Italian Jewry compared to other Euro-

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pean countries under Nazi rule. Still, 245 Jews were deported from Turin alone, and 224 of them were murdered. Levi himself tells us that of the 649 Jews who were shipped to Auschwitz with him on February 22, 1944, only 23 came home alive. So his survival was, exactly as he described it in *The Drowned and the Saved*, "anomalous." Almost everything about Levi's life, though, turns out to have been anomalous, beginning with his self-representation as a kind of moderate everyman.

He was anomalous both for the fact of surviving Auschwitz and for the kind of survivor that he was. He entered Auschwitz with a deep commitment to experimental reason and analytic scrupulousness, and the central, shocking anomaly of his entire existence is that he saw no reason to abandon that way of being and thinking, in the death camp or in his subsequent accounts of what he had witnessed there. If Auschwitz was, to him, "pre-eminently a gigantic biological and social experiment," then he treated his language itself as part of that appalling experiment, deliberately testing whether and to what extent a secular, humanistic, and, in the strictest sense, decorous vocabulary could endure under those conditions. That so much of his cast of mind and language not only survived Auschwitz, but was indispensable to his physical and moral survival there, was paradoxical enough; but still more so was how it continued to provide him with the resources for a whole series of major literary works.

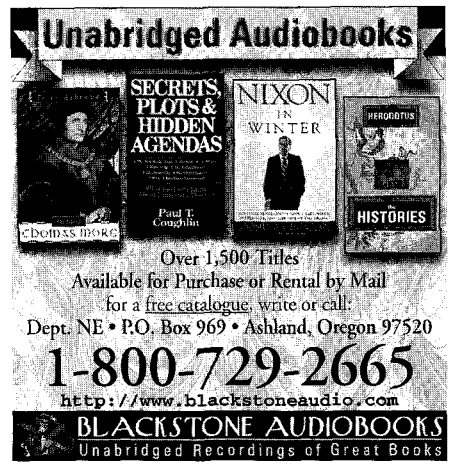
THE GREAT PARADOX of Levi's style—its utter literary mastery of conditions of utter helplessness and degradation—was so idiosyncratic an achievement that for decades it scarcely found a readership at all. But the triumph of that clear, poised voice is also why his self-annihilation—a term I prefer to suicide, because it recognizes some of the ambiguities of his final act on April 11, 1987—can feel so demoralizing, since it seems to contradict the successful results of his lifelong "experiment."

Precisely what happened that day will probably always remain a mystery. Diego Gambetta's recent hypothesis that Levi suffered a momentary dizzy spell, induced in part by the anti-depressants that he was taking, is certainly plausible. Even if Levi's fall was indeed an accident, however, it still raises the specter of a *fortuna* re-entering his existence: the malignant counterpoise to the beneficent one that kept him alive in Auschwitz. Whether or not he finally ended his own life from too huge a burden of dreams, it still seems to me factually impossible, as well as spiritually presumptuous, to attempt to isolate and to rank the different griefs that made him choose death that particular day. There was, in any case, less and less separation for Levi between the fears from his past that erupted when he was asleep and the bleakness of his waking hours. Both were growing intolerable. He was in despair over what he perceived as the public attention paid to Holocaust deniers, and a growing indifference to the Shoah among the young, and the anxiety about the re-emergence of right-wing movements in Europe; and there were also his actual nightmares from his days at Auschwitz; and all this coincided with a more quotidian unhappiness about his increasing difficulty in writing, as well as a serious depression following a prostate operation in March, 1987. To regard only the Shoah despair as "worthy" of Levi, and post-operative depression as "unworthy" of him, goes against the whole prosaic spirit that animated his writing; and the view of his death as a negation of everything that he articulated in his books also goes against it.

ANYWAY, THE NARRATOR and the man were never simply identical, and it makes no more sense to collapse them into one at the end of his career than at the beginning. Levi himself repeatedly stressed that the characteristic tone of his books was a literary construct that exists in its pure form only on the page. In one of his late letters, he tried to clarify the crucial difference:

> In my books I have sometimes presented myself as brave or as faint-hearted, and sometimes as thoughtful or naïve, but always as a stable person, which I'm really not. I've been through long phases of instability ... and that is something I've never written about ... I'm considered as a sort of guru. Perhaps there is a wisdom in my books, which I don't think I have.

Indeed, the literary texts themselves are far from imperturbable. The rage and the despair that erupt in many of the poems and the angry polemics of *The Drowned and the Saved* are as much a part of Levi's work as his more dispassionate and analytical passages. There is a palpable despair evident throughout *The Drowned and the Saved*, manifest in recurring questions such as this: "Have we—we who have returned—been able to understand and make others understand our experience?" There is also the severity of his verdict against those who would try to relativize his injury, the scorn that he felt for the facile psychologizing of the relationship between victim and oppressor:



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> I do not know, and it does not much interest me to know, whether in my depths there lurks a murderer, but I do know that I was a guiltless victim and I was not a murderer. I know that the murderers existed ... and still exist ... and that to confuse them with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all, it is a precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth.

In Levi's work, this is a new intensity.

AND YET THE bitterness does not purge or cleanse him. Instead, it compels Levi to admit that the suffering that he endured is ineradicable and isolating:

> The ocean of pain, past and present, surrounded us, and its level rose from year to year until it almost submerged us. It was useless to close one's eyes or turn one's back to it. Because it was all around, in every direction, all the way to the horizon.... The just among us, neither more nor less numerous than in any other human group, felt remorse, shame, and pain for the misdeeds that others and not they had committed, and in which they felt involved, because they sensed that what had happened around them and in their presence, and in them, was irrevocable. Never again could it be cleansed.

Levi's mordant equanimity was always fragile. The fact that he could not sustain it indefinitely only makes its accomplishment over so many decades more extraordinary. The loss of faith that there was a readership for what he had to say kept Levi from writing for nearly eleven years after the completion of *Survival in Auschwitz*. Yet when he did rediscover himself as a writer, what stands out is the sovereign self-assurance of his language. Even in a book such as *The Drowned and the Saved*, whose subject-matter includes a harsh scrutiny of his right to speak for other victims of the Shoah, it is remarkable how little he allowed his uncertainty and his self-doubt to deflect the clarity of his prose.

In *The Drowned and the Saved*, sentences often begin with phrases such as, "it is naïve, absurd, and historically false," as though the more Levi struggled against his own despair at the growing trivialization of the Nazi genocide, the more his prose, in a kind of compensatory balancing gesture, asserts its right to render judgment with unwavering confidence. The first chapter, for example, opens with the kind of categorical assertion more often found in an essay by one of the great Encyclopedists or in a novel by Stendhal than in a meditation on the Nazi genocide: "Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument." Such formulations arise out of—and impart to the reader—a bedrock confidence in the capacity of language to speak lucidly and decisively about even the most wrenching material.

The result, in *The Drowned and the Saved*, seems to me something quite singular in contemporary writing: an optimism of syntax in the service of a deeply pessimistic reflection. It is a richer and more complicated amalgam than Levi had attained before, and it brings him, at the end of his career, very close to the classical style of writers such as Virgil and Leopardi. Charles Conreau, who was with Levi in the last days before the liberation of the camp, and who is one of the main characters in the concluding chapter of *Survival in Auschwitz*, described Primo Levi as "a marvelous weigher of souls." He was also, unmistakably, a marvelous weigher of words. ■

The Public Professor

By ALAN BRINKLEY

Henry Steele Commager: Midcentury Liberalism and the History of the Present by Neil Jumonville

(University of North Carolina Press, 328 pp., $49.95)

HENRY STEELE COMMAGER was one of the best-known and most revered American historians of the twentieth century, which his long life almost exactly spanned. And yet few people read, or even recall, his work today. This is partly because Commager's scholarship, like most historical scholarship, has been superseded by that of his successors; but the obscurity of his work is also a result of his decision—taken early in his career and embraced with increasing fervor—to be not just a scholar, but a public figure. Commager wrote not just for the academy, but for a broad general public. He focused less on producing works of scholarship than on providing historically informed commentary on public affairs. He wrote some significant books, to be sure; and he was immensely learned, enormously well read, and an astute critic of the work of students and colleagues. Yet his role as a scholar often seemed secondary to his role as what we now call a public intellectual. Gradually, his public activities seemed to replace his scholarly ones almost completely.

Neil Jumonville has written this thoughtful and intelligent biography precisely because of his interest in Commager's decision to choose a public role over a scholarly one. For Jumonville, the author of *Critical Crossings*, a study of the New York intellectuals, Commager's life stands as a rebuke to the insularity, the specialization, and the straitened careerism of the contemporary scholarly world. Historians, he remarks, "as a rule have shied away from contemporary public enthusiasms and have had less impact on political life than they could have." They have feared being dismissed as partisans or journalists and have sought the recognition of the academy, not the public. But Commager exemplified a different and admirable model. Historians, Jumonville insists, "must reach out and engage the wider public in a dialogue about historical issues if history as a field is to continue to have relevance in our national culture."

In addition, Jumonville argues, Commager's lifelong attachment to an ardent and perdurable liberalism makes him an emblematic figure of his generation of scholars, most of whom were, even if less visible to the public, also committed to the achievements and the ideals of the liberalism of their time. That generation has been challenged, and in many cases scorned, by many recent historians, who have bridled at what they consider the excessively celebratory tone of post-war scholarship and its inadequate attention to social and cultural diversity. Jumonville does not dispute these charges; but he insists that Commager and his contemporaries were not the

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complacent defenders of the status quo that their critics sometimes describe. Commager may have resisted the cultural radicalism that has so enamored the post-structuralist left, but he remained true to an essentially Jeffersonian faith that kept him consistently and often even stridently critical of conservative domestic policies and foreign misadventures. His career, Jumonville insists, is a fine illustration of the continuing value of midcentury liberalism.

COMMAGER WAS BORN in 1902 into a modestly prosperous midwestern family that dissolved around him before he was nine. His parents divorced, his mother died, and he spent the remainder of his youth in the home of his maternal grandfather, Adam Dan, a well-known Danish Lutheran minister in Chicago and part of a democratic reform faction of the American church. He provided his grandson with an example of social and political activism. Commager entered the University of Chicago at the age of 16 and studied under the famous constitutional scholar Andrew McLaughlin, who, like Commager's grandfather, believed in the importance of political engagement as an integral part of the scholarly life. McLaughlin's example helped to spur Commager's commitment to a career in history and his decision to enroll in the university's doctoral program. By the time he earned his degree in 1929, he had spent several years studying in Europe, had accepted a position teaching American history at New York University, and had gotten married.

Despite the examples of his grandfather and his mentors, Commager did not enter the history profession in search of a major public role. His first ventures into the world beyond the academy resulted less from his commitments than from his finances. Struggling to support a family in New York on his meager NYU salary, Commager began reviewing books for the *Herald Tribune* and very quickly became one of the paper's most frequent contributors. In 1932, he wrote a glowing review of Allan Nevins's biography of Grover Cleveland; and soon after that, Nevins, a decade older and an eminent figure at Columbia University, contacted Commager and began a relationship that continued for more than thirty years and became the most important friendship in both men's lives.

Already one of the nation's best-known historians, Nevins had begun his career as a journalist and never abandoned his commitment to engagement with a broad public. He was less political (and considerably less liberal) than Commager, but his example nevertheless reinforced, and strengthened, Commager's own movement into a more public life. It also helped facilitate Commager's move from New York University to Columbia in 1938. And by then Commager had himself become a prominent figure in American intellectual life.

That prominence was due partly to his visibility as a reviewer and essayist and to his wide acquaintances within the New York literary community. It was also a result of his collaboration with the noted Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison on the most successful American history textbook of the mid-twentieth century: *The Growth of the American Republic.* Known for its self-consciously literary style, filled with anecdotes and rhetorical flourishes, it presented American history as a brave adventure in progress. There was tension at times between Morison's patrician conservatism and Commager's populist liberalism, but they were eclipsed by the skill of both authors for producing smooth and lively narratives.

PERHAPS THE LEAST significant contribution to Commager's growing reputation came from his own scholarly work. His dissertation was on the nineteenth-century Danish reformer John Friedrich Struensee, a social crusader who attracted Commager's attention both because he offered a vehicle for exploring his own Danish heritage and because Struensee's politics seemed to Commager compatible with his own. The thesis won a prize from the American Historical Association, but it was never published. His first major work, a biography of the abolitionist Theodore Parker, published in 1936, was recognized as a significant achievement, but it was widely criticized for its absence of critical interpretation, for its almost Rankean effort at "objectivity." This study of one of the most passionate figures of nineteenth-century America seemed curiously passionless, and all the more curiously because its author was a man who, in other contexts, was not at all reluctant to express strong opinions in print.

The loftier academic climate of Columbia did nothing to diminish Commager's protean non-academic energies. He wrote constantly for the *Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Saturday Review*, *Senior Scholastic* (a magazine aimed at high-school students), and many others. He lectured widely across the nation and in Europe, in universities and before non-academic groups. He accepted visiting professorships at Oxford and Cambridge, and in the early 1940s became involved in the public life of Britain, helping the government prepare its people for World War II (at the same time that he was exhorting the American public to commit itself to the struggle). He and Nevins helped launch the Columbia Oral History Project and, years later, the popular history magazine *American Heritage.*

FROM A DISTANCE, his life looked like his Columbia office, which was chaotic, with huge piles of books and papers always sitting on his desk and on the floor, and with dozens of projects, large and small, competing for his attention. There was an almost frantic air about him, as he dashed around town with his over-stuffed briefcase and as he seized whatever spare moments he could find to pound away on his portable typewriter in an effort to finish whatever essay or review had the most pressing deadline.

Perhaps inevitably, Commager's busy life left him little time for research, and his life of Theodore Parker was his only book that was heavily based on archival sources. *Majority Rule and Minority Rights*, which appeared in 1943, was a tour de force of erudition and vigorous argument, a staunch defense of Jeffersonian democratic ideals and an attack on what he considered the undemocratic institution of judicial review. His best-known book was *The American Mind*, published in 1950, a wide-ranging and highly opinionated survey of American intellectual history from the 1880s to the 1940s, dedicated to the proposition that "there is a distinctively American way of thought, character, and conduct." In it, he gave pride of place to the strain of modern American thought that Commager himself most admired: pragmatism. "It was," he wrote with typically Jeffersonian passion,

> a democratic philosophy, held every man a philosopher, gave every man a vote, and counted the votes of the simple and the humble equal to those of the learned and the proud. It took its truths where it found them, sometimes in the unlikeliest places. It made philosophy a servant, not a master, an instrument, not an end. It assumed that men could direct their spiritual as they did their political destinies; it overthrew the tyranny of philosophical authoritarianism and substituted the democracy of popular representation.

Read today, both these books are impressive for their literary quality and for their boldness. Yet they also seem dated and superficial: the product of a talented scholar musing on the issues and the scholarship of his time, not of any genuine independent research. Similar criticisms greeted Commager's work at the time, but the criticism did not prevent his books from achieving popular success.

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Commager lamented from time to time his inability to produce more conventional works of history. For years, he nursed research projects of one kind or another, among them a biography of William Jennings Bryan, only to pass them on to others or to abandon them altogether for lack of time. But he never lamented for very long, because there was always much else to do. His real achievement during his long and active life was less to contribute to scholarship than to contribute, often influentially, to the public discourse of his time. He sustained and advanced an academic tradition that is now increasingly rare: the scholar as public intellectual.

In the historical profession alone, there were numerous mid-century figures who, like Commager, were prominent public figures committed to communicating with a non-academic audience and influential in shaping intellectual life. Commager's Columbia colleagues Allan Nevins, Richard Hofstadter, and Lionel Trilling were all part of this tradition, and so were, in various ways, such others, older and younger, as Samuel Eliot Morison, Charles Beard, Carl Becker, Arthur Schlesinger Sr., Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith. But Commager moved further into the world of public activism than most other scholars. He was a more natural crusader than all but a few of them, and he gave up more of his academic life than most of them.

Commager's public activism was not an exercise in self-promotion, as is the case with some academic talking heads today. It was an effort to use his stature as a scholar to advance a set of beliefs to which he was deeply committed, and that were imperiled by the circumstances of his time. He was an indefatigable advocate for American aid to Britain after 1939 and, soon thereafter, for American intervention in World War II. He was undoubtedly the most outspoken American academic in the battle against McCarthyism in the early 1950s. He was a fervent opponent of the Vietnam War and what he considered the misuse of American power in the world beginning in the 1960s. He denounced corruption in government and in the corporate world. He was a particularly outspoken critic of the Nixon scandals.

Those were causes that many of his academic colleagues also addressed. But Commager was not just more outspoken than they were; he also embraced a brand of liberalism different from the kind most academics chose. To many of the academic liberals of the 1950s and early 1960s, the key to a progressive future was to rescue the nation's public life from the narrow, provincial concerns of local politics, and to create a new national culture capable of overcoming prejudice and producing a genuinely tolerant and enlightened community. This has often been described as the "cosmopolitan" sensibility, and it carried with it an unspoken belief in the importance of vesting authority in enlightened educated people.

Many cosmopolitan liberals were deeply fearful of popular passions, convinced that "mass politics" run amok had produced fascism and Stalinism in Europe and McCarthyism and racial bigotry in the United States. A cosmopolitan politics, they believed, would not only ensure tolerance, it would also keep popular prejudice in check. Such liberals believed in democracy, certainly, but in a democracy structured in a way that prevented the people from exercising authority too directly.

Closely tied to this sensibility was the belief, among many historians, in the existence of what became known as the American "consensus," the conviction that despite the many disagreements in the nation's public life the American people shared what Richard Hofstadter called "a common climate of opinion," a basic belief in the value of individual liberty and acquisitive capitalism. Consensus, not conflict, was the key to understanding the American past. The rise of the consensus idea helped shape another scholarly movement that gained momentum after World War II: the American Studies movement. American Studies began in the 1930s as an effort to link the study of history with the study of literature. But it gradually became as well an attempt to define an American "national character," to illustrate the traits that most Americans had in common as members of a shared ideology and culture.

Commager was different. He was throughout his life an ardent Jeffersonian, convinced that the struggle for democracy was a struggle to wrest authority from elites and to place it in the hands of the people, whose basic wisdom he seldom doubted. Hence his astonishing position in *Majority Rule and Minority Rights* against judicial review of legislative decisions, and his later hostility to the growth of presidential power. Commager did not doubt the importance of intellectuals and elites in shaping public discourse, and he took his own role in that task very seriously. Nor was he a populist by temperament. A fervent Anglophile, he took great pride in having held professorships at both Oxford and Cambridge and, some of his colleagues believed, self-consciously adopted the stentorian demeanor of an Oxbridge don. He liked to live well, and he spent money lavishly. Yet he remained, at heart, a philosophical populist, looking to "the people" to solve problems created by the "elites" and the "interests." He was, ultimately, a liberal more in the spirit of Charles Beard and Vernon Parrington, figures of an earlier scholarly generation, than in the spirit of more contemporary intellectuals such as Hofstadter and Trilling.

This, perhaps, was why he displayed a relative reticence on the issue of race, the issue that so inflamed many of his scholarly contemporaries and that Commager himself had at least indirectly addressed in his early biography of Theodore Parker. Commager supported the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, certainly, and he deplored the combat; but

The Lake of White Flowers

It was a limited ideal,
That made a virtue of its own deficiency:
Dark, inert, and silent at the core,
Yet surrounded by a delicate penumbra of ideas,
And sensations jostling one another
In a vague haze of speculation.
It all seemed so effortless and free,
So unconstrained by anything like knowledge
Or the burden of experience. The years to come
Were still unformulated, while their words
Passed like little blips across my mind,
Like a blue sky with a frieze of birds.
And now they seem like emblems of another age,
An age of acquiescence and discovery,
Filled with interminable conversations,
Interminable nights, and songs like momentary
Blooms that moved from shape to shape
In a mysterious wave that made me happy.
I thought I knew what they meant,
But I didn't know. Poems of knowledge
Speak with accuracy and gravity and grace,
And cast a common shadow. These were lovely
In an incidental way, without magnificence.
But I still think that some of them were true.

John Koethe

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he never embraced the cause with the same fervor that he brought to other issues. This may have reflected his difficulty in fitting that battle, much of it between poor blacks and only slightly-less-poor whites, into the class-based intellectual framework with which he generally tried to explain the world. Commager also never felt comfortable with the multicultural agenda of the left in the 1980s and 1990s—perhaps because by then he was growing too old to absorb new ideas, but more likely because of his lifelong commitment to a democratic ethic in which power, not culture, was the critical ingredient.

Commager's differences with the prevailing liberalism of his generation of scholars no doubt accounts for his relatively smooth passage through the 1960s and 1970s. While many of his colleagues found themselves deeply alienated from, and pilloried by, the student left, and while some of them became increasingly conservative as a result, Commager looked more sympathetically at the new radicalism and particularly at its criticism of the Vietnam War. He was generally tolerant of popular dissent, welcomed the engagement of citizens in public discourse, and showed none of the fear of "mass politics" that troubled many of his contemporaries. He was also, despite the intensity with which he denounced people and policies that he disliked, a generally optimistic man. He tended to believe that most things—particularly things that welled up from below—would work out well in the end.

Commager resigned from Columbia in 1956 to assume a position at Amherst College in Massachusetts. He left New York in part because Allan Nevins was retiring and would soon move to California, but mainly to escape the heavy teaching demands of a research university and the heavy social demands of New York. "I am buying time," he told his friend Merle Curti. "I feel mortality these days." He spoke wistfully of returning to research, of writing more scholarly books. But being in Amherst did not reduce the invitations to write and to speak, nor did it reduce Commager's eagerness to accept them. For more than thirty more years, until old age finally slowed him, he traveled ceaselessly, wrote incessantly, and taught at Amherst rather intermittently. He died in 1998, at the age of 95, commenting on the world around him almost to the end.

The lives of scholars are not usually the stuff of biography, and in many ways Commager's life was no exception. After his difficult childhood, he enjoyed decades of almost uninterrupted success, and his busy life fell into a pattern that shifted only marginally over the years. There were no major crises, no traumas, few important disappointments. Jumonville has not tried to create drama where there is none. Instead he has used Commager's life to illustrate a tradition of politically engaged scholarship that is imperiled in today's far more professionalized and insular academic world. In the process, Jumonville has produced short but perceptive portraits of many other important midcentury academics—Nevins, Morison, Hofstadter, and others—and an interesting analysis of such important scholarly developments as the growth of the American Studies movement and the birth of "consensus" scholarship. He has written not simply a life of Commager, but a valuable, generous, and scrupulous interpretation of historical scholarship in Commager's time.

Commager's contributions to the world of history may have been more modest than his talents might have led his colleagues to expect. But his contributions to the public conversations of his time were much greater than those of almost any of his contemporaries, let alone the generations of scholars who have followed him. Jumonville closes his book with an apt passage from Richard Hofstadter's study of Charles Beard, the greatest public scholar of the first half of the twentieth century. It could describe Commager as well: "Some scholars choose to live their lives, usefully enough, amid the clutter of professional detail. [He] aimed to achieve a wisdom commensurate with his passion, and to put them both in the public service. No doubt he would rather have failed in this than succeeded in anything else." Commager may have failed in other things, but not in his mingling of wisdom and passion. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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be merely a transparent window through which to view "stories and actors," reduces cinema to a very meager art form indeed and certainly misses Kubrick's point. As for the title of the film, it seems to describe the manner in which Kauffmann watched it.

MICHAEL HICKEY
Los Angeles, California

Portraits and artists

TO THE EDITORS:

I regret that the mere mention of such satanic artists as Warhol, Gilbert & George, Chuck Close, and Cindy Sherman in my catalogue essay for the National Gallery's Ingres portrait show makes Jed Perl's "hair stand on end" as his "alarm bells start going off" ("Adagio," July 19 & 26). His fit, alas, prevented him from giving innocent readers a clue about what I actually wrote. My point was that, in terms of traditional views of twentieth-century art, which focused on the triumph of an anti-realistic aesthetic, portraiture had taken a backseat, whereas in recent decades—witness the artists who make Perl shudder—the genre has seen a major renaissance, and this climate, in turn, has made us want to look in fresh ways at earlier portraits, whether by Ingres, Renoir, Sargent, or Picasso.

Never did I imply that there were no great twentieth-century portraits, nor did I suggest for a moment that Ingres's portraits were anathema to twentieth-century art; in fact, I explained how they were assimilated by a Cubist aesthetic. As for tilting at windmills, the artists who so infuriate Perl are mentioned, in most cases, only by name and appear only in a few short introductory and closing remarks. The rest of my 22-page essay focuses on how Ingres used art history when painting portraits of his contemporaries. In his fervor to cleanse Ingres of any postmodern associations, Perl not only warped my brief efforts to locate the master's portraits in the contemporary art world, but, even odder, ignored almost my entire text: namely, what I wrote about Ingres's portraits.

ROBERT ROSENBLUM
Professor of Fine Arts
New York University
New York, New York

JED PERL REPLIES:

I never claimed to be criticizing the totality of Robert Rosenblum's essay; in fact, I said that he "has written well on Ingres and neoclassicism." Our disagreement is about Ingres and twentieth-century art. I am disappointed—and, yes, my alarm bells do start going off—when a writer says that he is speaking "in terms of traditional views of twentieth-century art." Are those his views? Or Cindy Sherman's views? Is it "traditional" to believe, as Rosenblum apparently does, that "in recent decades ... portraiture has seen a major renaissance"? I don't see that renaissance, for the simple reason that I don't think portraiture—great portraiture—ever went away.

Two more things. I don't consider Warhol, Gilbert & George, Chuck Close, and Cindy Sherman "satanic," just much overrated. And the readers of TNR are anything but "innocent." ■

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PITTSBURGH DIARIST

Found in Space

MY WIFE RECENTLY GOT a wonderful new job, which was a serious blow to both of us. The job is in Pittsburgh, we live in Brooklyn, and we've decided to keep homes in both places. So whereas we had been thinking of our life in terms of time—one step after another into the future—now we have to consider space. Our every thought about The Next Step occurs simultaneously with calculations meant to ensure that we will both be sharing the same physical space at the same moment. And my idea of getting matching cell phones seems to have made the situation even murkier. One night, when I was in our Brooklyn apartment, I called my wife at her office to chat. Her office is at the other end of the apartment. She was delighted to hear from me. We arranged to meet for a drink in the living room later in the week.

THERE ARE OTHER ANXIETIES. PITTSburgh itself, for example. If there's one thing I dislike, it is the parochialism of New York cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitanism that often comes down not just to the premise of New York as the center of the world, but to the logical deduction from that of your fabulous New York self as the center of the world. But neither do I go in for some New Yorkers' condescending patter about the manifold wonders of the provinces. This is one of the standard methods that (male) intellectuals will use to notify you of their status as regular guys, by which they mean that they are bigger and better intellectuals. I think places in America outside the big cities are rich with meaning and full of people who live lives that are complex and intense. But—since we are on the subject of space—the ready-made familiarity of the spaces among people outside big cities sometimes alienates me. It is superficially inviting and comforting; it lulls. Crowded urban places, however, have large existential spaces. You are expected and encouraged to calibrate carefully the distance between yourself and other people. This is a plastic, functional alienation, and I find it genuinely inviting and comforting. And it is never lulling. Still, why am I so happy to be out here?

NEW YORKERS LOVE TO COMPLAIN about how impossibly busy their lives in New York are. Here in Pittsburgh I don't have any such complaints, though I don't know how long it will be before I turn my lack of complaint into a major grievance. And time could be running out. Pittsburgh was recently ranked the sixth-safest city in the country, but two weeks ago, in the affluent Squirrel Hill neighborhood, someone attacked a police station with a semi-automatic weapon in a drive-by shooting. Luckily, no one was hurt except for one officer who was struck in the foot and another who hurt his back diving for cover. Now in New York, jadedness is often expressed by an automatic excitement over the smallest things, and an assault on a police station, which is not a small thing, would have been treated by the local media as a world-historical event. You can imagine the mileage Giuliani and his cops would have gotten out of it. Not in Pittsburgh. One member of the force shrugged it off, saying, somewhat sadly, that she and her fellow officers had always thought something like that was going to happen sooner or later. There was nothing unsettling about her melancholy aplomb: it was, transparently, a mask for a slightly pummeled pride. Try to conceive of a public figure in New York exhibiting even the mildest shame.

HATRED IS THE QUICKEST KIND OF intimacy, but, in a pinch, simple animadversion will do. Maybe I am needling my native city because I want to get closer to it in my time of dislocation. So allow me another item in my catalogue of obnoxious New York qualities, nearly all of which I share. This one is the tendency of a certain type of New Yorker to consider any place outside New York that he or she visits as representative of the rest of the world. I will now indulge this tendency with regard to Pittsburgh. A hop, skip, and a jump away from Ohio, the city is somewhat Midwestern, yet people talk more about New York than Chicago. But it is too low-key, earnest, religious, and hardworking to be considered part of "back East." Some Pittsburghers have a bit of West Virginia mountain roughness; some have the older working-class wariness; many more have the easy, open manner of people living in a place of good fortune. To me, goldenly prosperous Pittsburgh seems a city whose identity consists of not being adamant about its own authenticity.

MAYBE THIS IS A RESULT OF THE STEEL industry's having gone belly-up 20 years ago, since which time the city hasn't settled on a base economy—and thus a particular cast of culture—to put in its stead. But I think of Pittsburgh as a place that always steeled you and raised you right, and then encouraged you to leave it and to live sympathetically and to look back on it with fondness. From rigid, rudimentary steel to dignified, adaptable gold—not a bad trajectory for either a person or a city. This looseness of identity that Pittsburgh has is like a cosmopolitanism from within.

READING OVER THAT LAST PARAGRAPH, I think I am just going to have to admit to myself that, here in Pittsburgh, I feel like a million dollars, though, truth to tell, I've only been here for two weeks. In celebration, therefore, I am going to complain loudly about a well-known complainer. His name is James Atlas, he is a journalist, and, to my mind, he is the most parochial of New York cosmopolitans. Atlas has made himself slightly notorious, and more than slightly risible, for riding a hobbyhorse about the death of serious writing in America. In several articles, he has declared that thinking and writing as a high, disinterested pursuit is extinct, and that no one reads serious books anymore. And he connects these dramatic developments to the fact that there is no money in such endeavors. He is keenly chagrined that his real estate agent, who "lives in the fancy building next door," no longer nods hello to him in the street. He whines a lot about not being able to afford the privileges a man of his caliber deserves, and he does this in essays that always manage to inform you that he has, in the end, attained the privileges that a man of his caliber deserves.

I WANT TO MAKE ATLAS AN OFFER. Open your Manhattanated eyes and peer out over the Hudson. Stop kvetching and . . . come to Pittsburgh! Here you will make even less money than you do in New York, yet you will have a better quality of life. You have maybe one house in the country now? In western Pennsylvania, you can buy three. You will never be humiliated by your real estate agent again. And I will introduce you to men and women who think as a vocation for the sheer pleasure of it, who live for books and art, who read Proust and Mann and Joyce and big, fat, serious biographies. They follow their inclinations into an obsession rather than their tax bracket out to the Hamptons. Together—yes, the two of us—you and I will astound the old expectation of passage from small town to big city; we will let unconsidered spaces teach something to our megalopolized, time-constricted hearts. I know what you're going to say—but don't worry, I'll pay your airfare. In the strange space-time discontinuum of contemporary American life, everything is possible.

LEE SIEGEL

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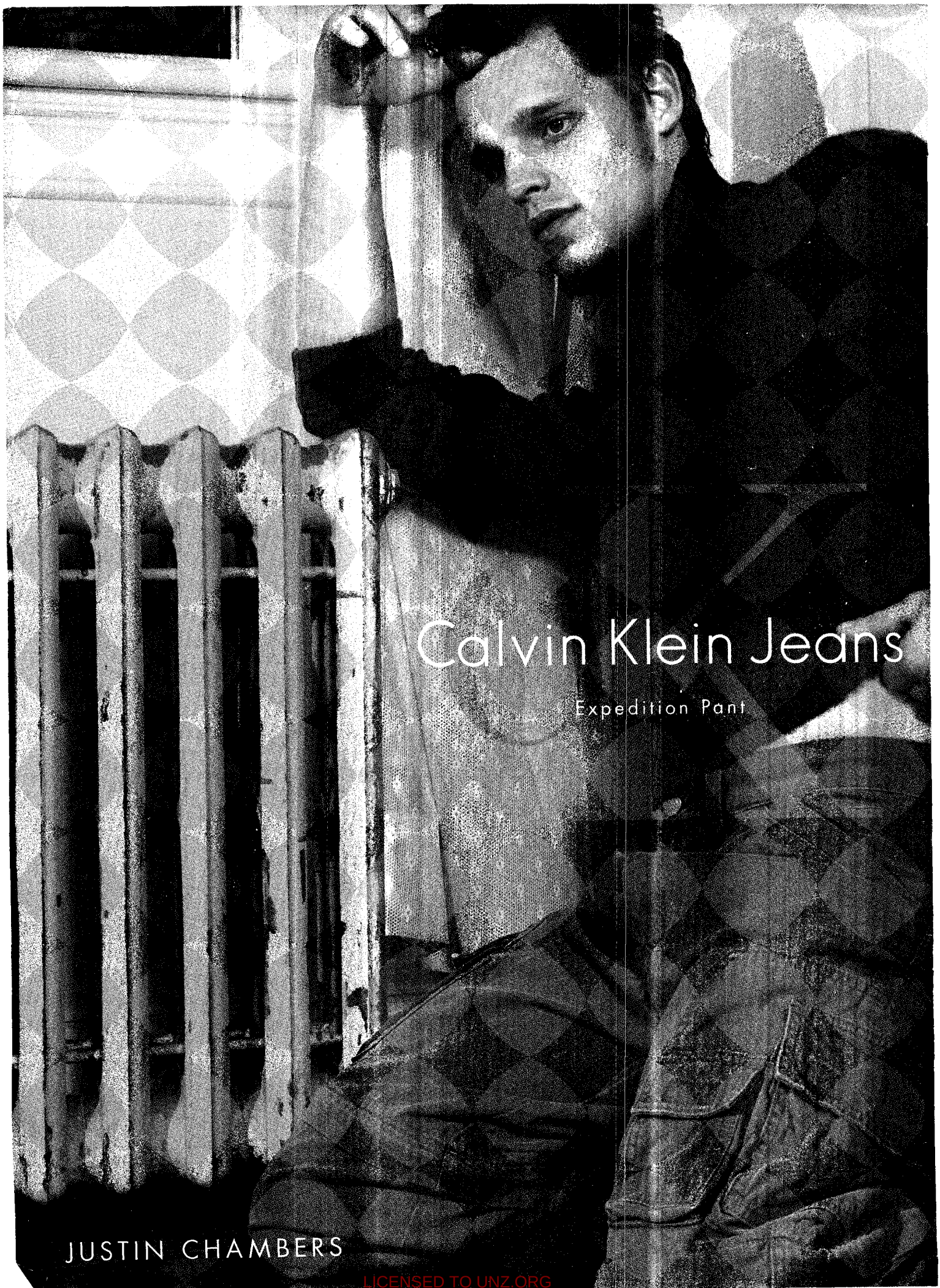

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